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SERMONS

ON

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

BY DAVID BLACK,

LATE MINISTER OF LADY YESTER'S, EDINBURGH.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

AN

ACCOUNT

OF

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OF

THE AUTHOR.

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1808.

ACCOUNT

OF THE

LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF THE

REV. DAVID BLACK.

THE family from which MR BLACK descended, has produced several eminent ministers of the Church of Scotland, as well as many private individuals of distinguished piety.

His grandfather, the Rev. Thomas Black, was esteemed one of the most judicious, learned, and worthy ministers of the age in which he lived. He was first settled minister of Strathmiglo, in the county of Fife;

and in 1698 was translated to one of the charges in the town of Perth. In this important station he laboured with singular diligence and success. In 1707 he received a presentation to the professorship of divinity in the University of St Andrews. But the importunate solicitations of a people, sensible of their obligations to a faithful and beloved pastor, prevailed with him to decline that honourable appointment. He was the intimate friend of the celebrated Professor Halyburton at St Andrews, and the editor of a posthumous volume of Sermons by that learned and pious author. He died in 1739.

His son, the Rev. David Black, was ordained one of the ministers of Perth in 1737, whilst his father was yet living. He continued in this situation for thirty-four years, universally respected and beloved for his piety and integrity, for his gentle and amiable temper, and for his diligence and fidelity

in discharging the duties of the pastoral office. His judgment, distinguished by its perspicacity and strength, was often the resource of his friends; who, on many occasions, in cases of difficulty, profited by his wise and salutary counsels. —He married Jean Macvicar, daughter of the Rev. Neil Macvicar, one of the ministers of St Cuthbert's; a clergyman, whom few have excelled in warmth of devotion, in simplicity of manners, or in sanctity of life. Mrs Black greatly resembled her father in unaffected piety and sweetness of temper, which, joined to her other excellent qualities, rendered her a blessing to her husband and her family.—Mr Black died, after a very short illness, May 19. 1771. * His funeral

* Mr Black left the following children:

1. Bridget,—who married the Rev. Archibald Bonar, minister of Cramond.—Died January 4. 1787.

2. Thomas,—Merchant in Perth, and lately Provost of that Borough.

sermon was preached by the Rev. James Scott, one of the ministers of Perth, who on that occasion, whilst he testified his own affection and the public regret, offered a just and honourable testimony to the eminent worth of his departed colleague and friend.

The Rev. David Black, the subject of this Memoir, was born at Perth, May 23. 1762. Though deprived of his father when just nine years of age, the education which he received from his pious mother, was blessed as the means of leading his mind to an early acquaintance with serious religion. Whilst only in his tenth year, he was remarked for his tenderness of conscience, and for the

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3. ELIZABETH,—who married Thomas Young, Esq. of Arbenie.—Died September 19. 1785.

4. DAVID,—minister of Lady Yester's, Edinburgh.—Died February 25. 1806.

5. NEIL,—now residing in London.

readiness with which he received instruction; as well as for his diligence in reading the scriptures, and his attention to the duties of secret devotion. At an early period, he expressed a strong desire to consecrate his life to the work of the ministry. To this object, in which he was encouraged by his friends, all his subsequent schemes and pursuits were uniformly directed. He applied with diligence to his studies at the university of Edinburgh, and made proficiency above many of his equals, in the knowledge of the learned languages, as well as of theology, and the different branches of literature, more immediately connected with theological science.

In his sixteenth year he began to keep a diary, a practice in which he persevered till his last illness. These papers discover his habitual attention, not only to his external conduct, but also to the state and dispositions of his mind. Though he fre-

quently laments imperfections which could be known only to God and his own conscience, it evidently appears, that on many occasions, he experienced the peculiar comforts of true religion.

Having finished his studies at the university, and having passed through the usual trials before the Presbytery of Perth, with the high approbation of all the members who attended, he was licensed to preach the Gospel, August 25. 1784. It would be happy indeed for the church, if all who enter on the sacred office possessed that sense of its high importance, and that ardent zeal for promoting its great design, with which his mind was then impressed. His first appearances as a preacher, fully equalled the expectations of his friends; and there is reason to believe, that his occasional services, whilst a probationer, were accompanied with a divine blessing, to the spiritual advantage of many who heard him.

Mr Black's first settlement was at St Madoes, a small country parish, about six miles from Perth. His immediate predecessor in this charge was the Rev. Archibald Stevenson, one of the ablest and most respectable ministers of his time; whose talents and worth would have qualified him to fill with honour to himself, and with advantage to the public, any situation in the church. Mr Stevenson having died in December 1784, Mr Richardson of Pitfour, the Patron, presented Mr Black to this parish; and he was accordingly ordained, with the cordial approbation of the people, September 15, 1785. Mr Black enjoyed much personal comfort in St Madoes, and continued, for the space of nine years, to discharge the duties of his office with approved fidelity; possessing the full confidence and affection of his own people, and the unqualified estimation of all who knew him.

When the church of Lady Yester's, in the city of Edinburgh, became vacant in 1794, many respectable members of that congregation, as well as Mr Black's numerous friends in the city, were desirous that a minister of his character and talents should be invited to fill that important charge. The Magistrates and Town Council, concurring in the general sentiment, were pleased to grant a presentation in his favour. He was accordingly admitted to be minister of Lady Yester's, November 20, 1794.—The solemn services of the day were conducted by the late Dr Erskine,—a name extensively known, and justly dear both to the learned, and the christian world. On this occasion he preached that excellent sermon, entitled, "The Blessing of Christian Teachers," which is the third in the volume published in his life time. When that venerable man proceeded—like Paul the aged addressing Timothy his son—to deliver to his young friend the impressive charge subjoin-

ed to the sermon, sentiments of veneration for the speaker, and of kind affection for the young minister, pervaded every heart. "You have begun well," said Dr Erskine, "hold on to the end with persevering and in-"creasing diligence, and be not discouraged "by the difficulties of your work. Take heed "unto thyself, and unto thy doctrine; con-"tinue in them; for in doing this, thou "shalt both save thyself and them that hear "thee.—You have had the honour to de-"scend from two ministers of Perth, and "one of St Cuthbert's. May you be justly "loved and esteemed as they were, for the "amiableness of your temper, the exem-"plariness of your life, and your diligence "in the pastoral office. May the Lord be "with you, as he was with your fathers; "and may you have many for your crown "of rejoicing in the day of the Lord!"

In March, 1795, Mr Black married Agnes Wood, daughter of George Wood

of Warriston, Esq. in the parish of Currie. This event he considered as one of of the happiest in his lot. Her amiable dispositions were congenial to his own; and in her piety, prudence, and tender affection, he enjoyed the greatest domestic comfort.

Mr Black continued to be minister of Lady Yester's till his death; and his services in this station were highly acceptable and useful to his people.—He laboured with diligence in his preparations for the pulpit, and it will appear, from the specimen now given to the public, how much his discourses were adapted to general edification. His sermons, it must be remarked, derived peculiar advantage from his elocution and delivery. His manner was solemn and affectionate, earnest and persuasive. When expostulating with sinners, or unfolding to Christians the consolations of the gospel, there was often an animation in his address—a sacred fervour—a divine

unction, which powerfully impressed the auditory. He evidently felt the truths he was delivering, and spake as one standing in the presence of God, animated with a pure zeal for the glory of the Redeemer, and the salvation of immortal souls.

Nor did he confine his labours to the pulpit. He visited his parishioners in their own houses; and regularly every summer, except while the church was rebuilding, held meetings for catechetical exercises, which were uncommonly well attended. He possessed a singular felicity in engaging the attention of the young, and was successful, in many instances, in fixing on their minds lasting impressions of the truths of religion. To the sick members of his congregation, and to others who desired his visits, he regularly devoted a portion of his time.—To the necessities of such as were indigent, he ministered with a liberality, greater, perhaps, than a rigid prudence would have dictated.

The most perfect affection subsisted betwixt him and his congregation. They were justly sensible of the singular advantage they enjoyed, in having such a pastor. They looked up to him as their spiritual guide, and, since his death, have testified their respect for him, in a manner peculiarly honourable to their own feelings. Such also was his attachment to them, that he repeatedly declined to accept the offer of a collegiate charge. And when the church of Lady Yester's was found to be in so decayed a state, that it was no longer safe to assemble there for public worship, he readily entered into an arrangement, by which he was permitted to preach, on the forenoon of every Lord's day, in the chapel of ease, which belongs to the parish of St Cuthbert's. This he continued to do till the new church was opened, December 8, 1805, little more than two months before his death.

He retained always a warm affection for the people of Perth, and was ready on every occasion to promote their interests. When a plan was formed in 1793 to erect a chapel of ease in that town, he exerted himself with great zeal, along which some other ministers and private Christians, in forwarding this salutary and important object. The decision of the General Assembly in 1794, by which this plan was finally frustrated, he regretted as highly prejudicial both to the interests of the Established Church, and to the spiritual prosperity of the people of Perth.

To the Church of Scotland he was conscientiously attached. The sermons contained in this volume will sufficiently shew, how perfectly his views of christian doctrine accorded with the public standards of the church. His soul, indeed, abhorred the dishonesty of subscribing, as articles of peace, doctrines which the subscriber does

not believe to be "agreeable to the word of God, and founded thereon." The growing neglect of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, he certainly considered as one principal cause of the declining state of religion in the present times.—Though neither disposed, nor, perhaps, qualified to take any active share in the direction of public affairs, yet he felt it his duty steadily to resist all those measures, which, in his judgment, appeared to militate against the essential principles of the constitution of the church, or to endanger her most important interests.

The lively interest which he felt in the general prosperity of religion, led him to rejoice in the exertions which have, of late years, been made by Christians in different parts of the world, for propagating the gospel among heathen nations. Hence, too, he assisted with great alacrity at the formation of the Edinburgh Missionary Society,

and continued, to the end of his life, one of the most zealous friends of that institution.

He justly appreciated the blessings, which the inhabitants of the British empire derive from the civil constitution of their country. He was a steady friend to government, and strenuous in supporting its authority, even at the time, when, to serve a temporary purpose, his conduct was greatly misrepresented and traduced.

About the middle of February, 1806, Mr Black was seized with a fever, the symptoms of which did not appear alarming till Thursday the 20th of that month. On the forenoon of that day, his mind was remarkably tranquil and serene. In the course of an interesting conversation with a christian friend, he expressed, in strong terms, his confidence toward God through Jesus Christ, and his assurance of his personal interest in the salvation of the gospel. Towards

evening the disorder increased to a great degree, and from that time became so violent, as to prevent him from expressing, in such a manner as his friends could have wished, the state of his mind in the near prospect of dissolution. Nor was this necessary. His whole life had afforded an honourable testimony to the truth of Christianity; and all his principles and habits had been deliberately formed, under the influence of realizing prospects of an eternal world.—On the evening of Monday, February 24th, a considerable number of the congregation, and other friends, met in Lady Yester's church, and offered their united and earnest prayers for his recovery. But the Sovereign Disposer of events had determined to release his servant, from the services and sufferings of the present state. Mr Black died on the evening of Tuesday, February 25th, in the 44th year of his age, and 21st of his ministry.

The general regret occasioned by his death, sufficiently testified the high estimation in which his character was held, by persons of all ranks and denominations. This painful and unexpected bereavement Mrs Black was enabled to bear, with a fortitude and resignation, which displayed, in a striking light, the power of true religion to support the mind, in the most trying scenes of life. She was left with six children, one son and five daughters, of whom the youngest was born about three months after Mr Black's death.

On the Lord's day after his funeral, appropriate and impressive discourses were delivered in Lady Yester's church, by the Rev. Mr Bonar of Cramond, and the Rev. Dr Buchanan, Canongate: two of his friends, well qualified by their long and intimate acquaintance with him, to do justice to his character, and to direct the congregation to a suitable improvement of this afflicting

dispensation of providence.—The fathers of Mr Bonar and Mr Black had long been colleagues at Perth; a circumstance which laid the foundation of that endearing friendship which subsisted between their sons; and which, not only Mr Bonar's connection in marriage with Mr Black's sister *,—a truly pious and amiable lady,—but a remarkable similarity of character, sentiments, and pursuits, served to strengthen and perpetuate.—Though Mr Bonar declined to write the life of his friend, he has been so obliging, as to furnish a considerable portion of the materials from which this account is drawn up.

The limits of this memoir will not admit such a delineation of Mr Black's character, as might equal the just expectations of his friends, or convey to strangers an adequate idea of his worth. Yet, it may not be im-

* See Note, p. v.

proper to mention a few of those qualities, which secured to him, whilst living, the esteem and affection of all to whom he was known, and which must render his memory precious to all the friends of genuine Christianity.—His natural endowments were peculiarly adapted to the sphere, which providence had assigned for their exertion. His clear understanding, his sound judgment, and correct taste, qualified him well, both to investigate truth, and to display it with advantage. He was capable of great application to study, and might have risen to considerable eminence, had he chosen to employ his talents in the pursuit of literary fame.—His temper was calm and mild; and his manners were distinguished by an uncommon degree of sweetness and gentleness.—He possessed a considerable measure of sensibility, which appeared chiefly in his lively participation in the joys and sorrows of his friends, seldom in any strong expression of his feelings, when ex-

periencing ungenerous or injurious treatment.—His heart was the seat of all the kind affections. His endearing converse with his family and friends, gave to his society peculiar attractions.—His habits of life were simple, orderly, and free from ostentation. Moderate in his desires, and satisfied with his condition, he managed his own affairs with good sense and discretion; and was far from resembling those who trouble the world with pretensions, too often produced by discontent or vanity.—Modest and unassuming, he discovered none of that self-conceit and arrogance, which mark, with awful inconsistency, the character of some pretenders to religion. His humility shed a pleasing lustre over all the other excellencies of his character. In matters of indifference he was never tenacious of his own opinion. At the same time he discovered nothing of tameness or servility. He thought for himself, and steadily followed the convictions of his own mind. Hence he has been known,

on some occasions, to dissent from the opinion of his most respected friends.

Sincere and fervent piety, undoubtedly formed the most prominent feature in the character of Mr Black. It has been already stated, that at an early period of life he felt the power of religion on his mind; and his early choice was confirmed by the full convictions of his riper years. His piety was not confined to stated seasons of devotion. He lived under its influence, and discovered its happy effects in every part of his conduct. His faith filled his mind with peace and joy; raised him above the anxieties of life; sustained him under its various trials; and animated him with the hope of a blessed immortality.—His own reflections on some interesting occasions, and at different periods of his life, will exhibit a juster idea of the distinguishing character and habitual tendencies of his mind, than can be conveyed by any general description.

When entering on his Presbyterial trials, February 1784.—'Thursday the '19th was appointed for my examination before the Presbytery. It passed 'without censure: so that in due time, 'if the Lord spare me, my trials will go 'on. In the several steps of this affair 'I acknowledge and adore the hand of providence. How little would it signify to 'me, to have the countenance and approbation of my fellow-creatures, if I thought 'I had not the call of God himself to undertake this great work. Men may mistake our qualifications. They cannot penetrate into the secret purposes and dispositions of the heart, but all things are 'naked and open unto the eyes of Him with 'whom we have to do. He knows whether 'our aim be single or not, whether it is a 'sincere desire of being useful, an ardent 'love to Christ, and a generous compassion 'for the souls of men, that are our chief 'motives; or whether our minds are influ-

'enced by the mean desire of worldly emo-
'lument, ease, or honour.

'Great Searcher of hearts! hast thou not
'early determined me to choose this em-
'ployment, as that in which, by thy grace,
'I hope with most success to glorify thy
'name, and advance the best interests of
'my fellow-creatures. If ever I have in-
'dulged other views, O discover to me the
'deceit and hypocrisy of my heart, and let
'me bitterly repent my grievous folly.

'Methinks at this moment, if I know my
'own heart, I should willingly prefer the
'honour of being a minister of the gospel
'of Jesus Christ, however despised, to the
'dignity of the greatest potentate on earth.
'Since ever I was capable of any thing, I
'have always been inclined to devote my
'time and talents to the work of the minis-
'try, and have never, from my earliest years,
'seriously thought of any other profession.

'A concurrence of favourable circumstances, under the direction of providence, 'gradually succeeding each other, has tended to confirm my inclinations; and, upon the whole, now that the Lord has 'brought me hitherto, and made my way 'plain before me, what can I say, but, Father, thy will be done; glorify thy great 'name *in* me and *by* me; and fully qualify 'me for the work, thou hast appointed for 'me in thy vineyard. Let my own soul be 'daily and richly fed with the heavenly 'manna, the bread of life that came down 'from heaven; and endow me with the divine skill of dispensing to every one, like 'a faithful householder, their portion of 'meat in due season!'

When licensed to preach.—'Wednesday, 'August 25. 1784. a day which I hope never 'to forget. I have now received a new 'character, and entered on the discharge of 'a new and important office. Unto me,

'who am less than the least of all saints, is 'this grace given, that I should preach the 'unsearchable riches of Christ.—This is 'now the issue of many fears, and hopes, 'and prayers. Hitherto the Lord hath 'helped me. I have undertaken a great 'work; but blessed be God, he sends none 'a warfare on their own charges, but gives 'strength according to the day.'

In autumn, 1789, he was visited with a severe and dangerous illness. On his recovery, he expresses himself in his diary as follows:

'October 11. 1789. Again permitted, by 'the kind providence of God, to enter the 'pulpit, after being debarred from this pri- 'vilege about four months. I preached on 'this occasion from Job xxxiv. 31, 32. a 'passage, which afforded me some comfort 'in the time of my sickness.—Life in itself, 'with all the cares and troubles that attend it,

'would hardly be desirable for its own sake; 'but as it is the season of usefulness, as it 'gives an opportunity of advancing the in- 'terests of the Redeemer's kingdom, it is 'highly valuable, and in this view I desire 'chiefly to value it.—O Lord, watch over 'my soul, that I may watch for the souls of 'my people. Help me to live a life of closer 'fellowship and communion with thee; and 'then in health or in sickness, serving thee, 'or suffering from thee, I shall be satisfied, 'chearful, and happy.'

On the death of a child.—'February 6. '1799. An event which for some time we 'have been looking for, but still it is felt as 'a very sharp stroke, and hard to flesh and 'blood. Never was a lovelier child—she 'had arrived at an age peculiarly interest- 'ing, when the first dawnings of reason be- 'gin to appear. But it is the Lord, let him 'do what seemeth him good. It is his 'will. Our dear child is now, I trust, with

'Christ in heaven, joined to her kindred
'spirits around the throne.—What a mar-
'vellous change! what a glorious transition!
'from a sick-bed to a throne of glory; from
'weeping friends to glorified spirits; from
'a world of sin and suffering, to a world of
'perfect holiness and endless blessedness!
'How inconceivable the expansion of facul-
'ties, that must take place in the case of an
'infant, on its first entrance into the unseen
'world! It is an almost overwhelming
'thought, that our sweet babe already
'knows more, than the most perfect saint
'on earth. Let my soul bless God, that I
'have been honoured as the instrument of
'bringing into existence one, who is now
'added to the Redeemer's company above.
'Soon shall the last trumpet sound, and
'the sleeping dust of countless generations
'awake to life. I shall then see my dear
'child, not the feeble infant which she ap-
'peared on earth, but a glorified saint, con-

'formed to the image of her blessed Lord. 'O glorious hope!'

Happy communion season.—'Wednes-'day, November 11. 1801. Last Lord's 'day was our communion here, and much 'cause have I to observe the abundant 'grace and goodness of God. It was as 'sweet and solemn a day as ever I expe-'rienced in Lady Yester's. The number of 'communicants greater, I believe, than on 'any former occasion, and some of those 'admitted, gave hopeful evidences of a 'change having lately been wrought in 'them. Preached on Exod. xii. 14. *This 'day shall be unto you for a memorial.*— 'I find enough to keep me humble, even in 'the most favoured seasons. May the Lord 'keep his good hand about all who have 'been at his table. May the impressions 'of this delightful solemnity long remain 'upon my own heart, and excite to watch-'fulness and diligence.'

Anniversary of ordination.—'Lord's 'day, September 15. 1805, brings me to 'the 20th anniversary of my ordination to 'the sacred work of the ministry. It is a 'weighty and serious thought, that so long 'I have been spared and honoured to preach 'the gospel. In undertaking this great 'work, I hope I was actuated on the whole 'by pure motives, and that in the course of 'my ministry, I have been seeking not to 'please men, but to profit their immortal 'souls.—I can truly say I have found Christ 'to be a good master, and his work sweet 'and delightful, so that I would not ex-'change employments with the greatest 'prince or potentate on earth. No mate-'rial change of sentiment has taken place 'since I began to preach; only, if the Lord 'spare me, I would study to be more prac-'tical, more particular in the delineation of 'character, and more faithful in dealing 'with the consciences of men.'

A few years before his death, when so much enfeebled by a severe and lingering illness, that his continuance in life seemed to himself extremely precarious, he was enabled to look forward to death with composure and joy. Directing his attention to the consequences of such an event to his young and rising family, he thus expressed himself, 'I can leave the dear partner of 'my heart, and the dear pledges of our 'mutual love, upon the care and faithfulness 'of my heavenly Father. He hath made 'with me an everlasting covenant, well or-'dered in all things and sure; and hath 'graciously promised to be the God of my 'children. He abideth faithful and will 'not deny himself. He will keep what I 'have committed to him; and his blessing 'will be upon my offspring.'

The view which has been given, in the preceding narrative, of the life and character of Mr Black, will not appear ex-

aggerated to those by whom he was intimately known. It might not be difficult to mention some of his contemporaries, distinguished by a higher portion of those endowments and acquirements, which the men of the world admire, and which procure for their possessors, the envied, but perishable meed of earthly renown. But, while Mr Black possessed talents, equal to the attainment of every valuable object which he chose to pursue, let it be ever known as his honourable memorial, that his talents were unreservedly consecrated to the service of God; that his life eminently adorned the religion which he professed; and that he was honoured to be a faithful and successful minister of the gospel. To his character, the friends of Christianity may with confidence appeal, as one bright instance more of the power of the gospel, to promote the purity, the dignity, and the happiness of those who cordially embrace it. In him, indeed, was exemplified, in an eminent de-

gree, that sublime view of the Christian life which is given by the apostle Paul,—*a life hid with Christ in God.*

The publication of this volume of SERMONS has been loudly called for by Mr Black's friends, and by the public at large. It labours, to a certain degree, under the disadvantages which are common to posthumous publications. In preparing it for the press, great care has been taken, that no sentiment of Mr Black's should be suppressed or changed; though some verbal corrections, which seemed indispensible, have been hazarded.

It would be wrong to anticipate the judgment of the public, or to obtrude any opinion respecting the merits of the sermons contained in the present volume. On this point every reader will decide for himself. Those readers who have been accustomed to hear Mr Black, should not be disappoint-

ed, if his sermons seem, in the perusal, to want that peculiar charm which they derived from his earnest and impressive address. Others must not expect to be gratified, who look into this volume, only with the view of being amused with the subtilties of argumentation, the sallies of fancy, or the mere ornaments of style. But it is hoped that none will be disappointed, who peruse it with the single desire of having their understandings informed, and their hearts improved. They will have ample reason to be satisfied, if they find in it a clear and judicious illustration of the leading doctrines of Christianity, faithfully applied to the consciences and conditions of men. In this view, the volume now offered to the public, will furnish a valuable accession to that store of religious instruction, with which our language abounds.

SERMON I.

ON

THE DECEITFULNESS OF THE HEART.

JEREMIAH xvii. 9.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.

TRUE and faithful is the testimony of God. Men may amuse themselves and their fellow creatures with empty, high sounding descriptions of the dignity of human nature, and the all-sufficient powers of man; but every humble, every truly enlightened mind, will see and acknowledge the justness of the declaration in the text, that *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.*

This is a truth which, like many others in the word of God, can only be learned from experience. As long as we assent to it, merely because it is contained in the Scriptures, we are strangers to its nature, and cannot understand what it means: But, *as in water face answereth to face, so doth the heart of man to man.* Human nature in different ages and in different circumstances is still the same; and when, by means of the word, the secrets of our own hearts are made manifest, when we come to perceive the exact correspondence between the declarations of Scripture, and what passes within us, we are obliged to confess, that God is in it of a truth, since none but He who searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins of the children of men, could know so perfectly the inward workings of our minds, and those numberless evils which are hidden from the view of all our fellow creatures.

I purpose at present to speak only of the *deceitfulness* of the heart, a subject sufficiently extensive, not merely for one, but for many discourses, and which, after all that

can be said on it, must remain in a great measure unexhausted, for *who can know it?* The deceit that lodges in the heart is so complicated and so various, that it is impossible to trace it in all its windings. It is but comparatively a small part of it that any created mind can discover, and therefore, in the verse immediately following the text, God ascribes this knowledge to himself as his peculiar prerogative; *I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*

But, by the blessing of God, it may be useful to turn our attention to this deeply interesting subject, and point out some of the plainest and most decisive evidences of *the deceitfulness of the human heart*, which scripture, observation, and experience afford. It appears,

I. From men's general ignorance of their own character.

There is not any thing in the history of mankind more surprising, or at first view more unaccountable, than the self-partiality which prevails in the world. One would be apt to imagine, that it should not be so difficult to arrive at the knowledge of our real character, possessing, as we do, every possible advantage for attaining it. We have constant access to our own breasts, and are more deeply interested in the discovery, than in the acquisition of any other knowledge. But we see, in fact, that of all knowledge this is the rarest and most uncommon. Nor is it difficult to account for this fact, since *the heart is deceitful above all things*. Self-love casts a veil over the understanding, the judgment is warped by various circumstances, and hence it is, that many seem to be almost entire strangers to their own character. They think, and reason, and judge quite differently in any thing relating to themselves, from what they do in those cases in which they have no personal interest. Accordingly, we often hear people exposing follies for which they themselves are remarkable, and talking with great

severity against particular vices, of which, if all the world be not mistaken, they themselves are notoriously guilty. It is astonishing to what a pitch this self-ignorance and self-partiality may be carried! How frequently do we see men, not only altogether blind to their own character, but insensible to every thing that can be said to convince them of their mistake. In vain do you tender to them instruction or reproof, for they turn away every thing from themselves, and never once imagine that they are the persons for whose benefit these counsels and admonitions are chiefly intended.

Of this we are every day furnished with frequent instances in common life. The sacred history affords us a remarkable example in the case of David on one particular occasion: I say on *one* particular occasion, for the description that we have been giving by no means applies to David's general character. Few were, in general, more accustomed to self-inquiry. But when Nathan the prophet was sent to him, in consequence of his grievous fall in the matter of Uriah, such

was the insensibility, and self-ignorance which sin had produced, that he perceived not the application of the parable to himself, till the prophet declared, *Thou art the man.*

From this and similar instances, we are led to observe that, if we trace this self-ignorance to its source, we shall find that it is in general owing, not only to that partiality and fondness which we all have for ourselves, but to the prevalence of some particular passion or interest, which perverts the judgment in every case where that particular passion or interest is concerned. And hence it happens that some men can reason and judge fairly enough, even in cases in which they themselves are interested, provided it does not strike against their favourite passion or pursuit. Thus the covetous man will easily enough perceive the evil of intemperance, and perhaps condemn himself if he has been guilty of this sin in a particular instance. But he is altogether insensible to the dominion of his predominant passion, the love of money. It has become

habitual to him. His mind is accustomed to it, so that in every case, where his interest is concerned, his judgment is warped, and in these instances he plainly discovers that he is totally unacquainted with his own character. The same observation applies to other particular vices.

Here then, is one striking evidence of the deceitfulness of the heart. It produces ignorance of ourselves; it keeps men strangers to their own character; and makes them fatally presume that they are in friendship with God, while they are enemies to him in their minds and by wicked works.

II. The deceitfulness of the heart appears from men's general disposition on all occasions to justify their own conduct.

This disposition our first parents discovered immediately upon their eating the fruit of the forbidden tree. When the Lord appeared to Adam and charged him with his guilt, he attempted to justify himself by saying, *The woman whom thou gavest me to be*

with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And in like manner the woman replied, *The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.* Something also of this disposition is common to all their sinful posterity. We are all extremely partial to ourselves, and apt to view our own conduct in a different light from that in which we are accustomed to regard the conduct of our fellow creatures. When we observe improper conduct in others, the impropriety strikes us at once. Sin appears to us in its true and genuine colours, and we are ready to judge and condemn, perhaps with too much severity. But in our own case, the action is seen through a deceitful medium. The judgment is perverted by self-love, and a thousand expedients are employed, if not to vindicate, at least to apologise for our conduct. If we cannot justify the action itself, we attempt to extenuate its guilt from the peculiar circumstances of the case. We were placed in such and such a particular situation, which we could not avoid; our temptations were strong: we did not go the lengths that many others would have gone in similar cir-

cumstances; and the general propriety of our conduct is more than sufficient to overbalance any little irregularities with which we may sometimes be chargeable. Thus, on all occasions, men endeavour to justify their own conduct. They even learn to call their favourite vices by softer names. With them, intemperance is only the desire of good fellowship; lewdness is gallantry, or the love of pleasure; pride, a just sense of our own dignity; and covetousness, or the love of money, a prudent regard to our worldly interest. Strange infatuation! to think that by changing the names of vices, it is possible to change their nature; and that what is base and detestable in others, should be pardonable only in ourselves!

But it may be farther observed on this part of the subject, that besides these single determinate acts of wickedness, of which we have now been speaking, there are numberless cases in which the wickedness cannot be exactly defined, but consists in a certain general temper and course of action, or in the habitual neglect of some duty, whose

bounds are not precisely fixed. This is the peculiar province of self-deceit, and here, most of all, men are apt to justify their conduct, however plainly and palpably wrong. Whoever considers human life will see, that a great part, perhaps the greatest part of the intercourse amongst mankind cannot be reduced to fixed, determined rules: yet in these cases there is a right and a wrong, a conduct that is sinful and immoral, and a conduct, on the other hand, that is virtuous and praise-worthy, though it may be difficult, nay, perhaps impossible to ascertain the precise limits of each.

To give an example: There is not a word in our language that expresses more detestable wickedness than *oppression*. Yet the nature of this vice cannot be so exactly stated, nor the bounds of it so determinately marked, as that we shall be able to say, in all instances, where rigid right and justice end, and oppression begins. In like manner, it is impossible to determine how much of every man's income ought to be devoted to pious and charitable purposes: the

boundaries cannot be exactly marked; yet we are at no loss in the case of others to perceive the difference betwixt a liberal and generous man, and one of a hard-hearted and penurious disposition. In these cases, there is great latitude left for every man to determine in his own favour, and consequently to deceive himself; and it is chiefly in such instances as these, that men are ready to justify their conduct, however criminal. Because they are not chargeable with single determinate acts of wickedness, because you cannot precisely point out to them, in so many words, wherein they have done amiss, they falsely conclude, that their conduct is unexceptionable; though, perhaps, their general temper and behaviour may be uniformly wrong, inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel, and contrary to the plainest dictates of morality. I proceed to observe,

III. That the deceitfulness of the heart appears from the difficulty with which men are brought to acknowledge their faults, even when conscious that they have done wrong.

This necessarily follows from that disposition in human nature, to which I have already adverted, namely, the disposition on all occasions to justify our own conduct. Hence men in general are so backward to acknowledge their faults, and so displeased with those who are so faithful and friendly as to point them out. How few can bear to be told their faults! This is the sure and ready way to make most men your enemies, even though you administer the reproof in the gentlest, and most prudent manner. Instead of reflecting on their own conduct, which might convince them of the justice of what is laid to their charge, many, in these cases, set themselves immediately to discover faults in their faithful reprovers, or in those, who, they suspect, may have informed them; and turning away their attention entirely from themselves, are only concerned to find equal, if not greater blemishes in others. Thus deceitful is the heart of man. We wish always to entertain a favourable opinion of ourselves and of our own conduct, and are displeased with those who endeavour in any instance to change this opi-

nion, though it be done with the best, and most friendly intention.

But how unreasonable and preposterous is this degree of self-love! Were we alive to our true interests, we would wish to become better acquainted with our follies and our faults, and would esteem our faithful reprovers our best friends. Instead of feeling any resentment against them, we would turn all our resentment against ourselves; and endeavour, in the strength of divine grace, to correct those evils which, were we not so blinded by self-love, we might easily discover. But through the deceitfulness of the heart, men are generally disposed to justify their own conduct, and ready to throw the blame of what is amiss on any thing sooner than on themselves.

IV. The deceitfulness of the heart appears from the disposition which men discover to rest in notions and forms of religion, while they are destitute of its power.

In the purest ages of the church, there have been persons of this character, men who, from selfish or worldly motives have assumed a profession of religion, without understanding its nature, or feeling its power; having a name to live, but being spiritually dead. It is not easy for persons whose minds are in any degree informed, to divest themselves entirely of religious impressions. The fears that naturally accompany guilt, will at times obtrude themselves on the most giddy and thoughtless. But the pure, the spiritual, the humbling doctrines and precepts of the gospel are by no means agreeable to the natural mind; and therefore it is not wonderful that persons who have some apprehension of the truth of religion, but no acquaintance with its power, should eagerly grasp at something which may give them hope beyond the grave, while at the same time it leaves them in the quiet possession of their beloved lusts.

Hence it is that so many are hearers of the word only, and not doers also, deceiving their ownselves. Hence it is that so many

shew great zeal about small and unimportant matters in religion, who are shamefully deficient in some of its plainest and most essential duties; that so many are punctual in their observance of religious institutions, who are unjust and uncharitable in their conduct towards their fellow creatures; that so many can talk fluently and correctly on religious subjects, who are visibly under the dominion of evil tempers or evil habits; that so many are scrupulously exact in what regards the externals of religion, who are at no pains to cultivate its genuine spirit, or to perform its most substantial duties. Like the Pharisees of old, who paid tithes of anise, mint, and cummin, *they neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.* Hypocrisy in all its forms and appearances flows from the deceitfulness of the heart; for in general men deceive themselves, before they attempt to deceive others. Few are so bold as to lay down a plan of imposing on the world, without endeavouring, in the first instance at least, to impose on their own minds. Nor is it difficult, when the mind is strongly bi-

assed by the love of any particular sin, or the pursuit of any particular interest, to persuade ourselves that our conduct is, at least, excusable, if not innocent. A dishonest mind is satisfied with the meanest shifts and evasions; and persons who wish to be deceived into a good opinion of their conduct, are seldom at a loss to accomplish their purpose.

Balaam was a remarkable instance of this. He was a man of extensive knowledge and superior gifts. He was not a stranger to the impressions of religion, for in his calm reflecting moments, he desired to *die the death of the righteous*, nor could any consideration prevail with him to oppose the divine commandment, by cursing those whom God had blessed. But he *loved the wages of unrighteousness*. Covetousness was his ruling passion, and led him, by the advice which he gave to Balak, to contradict the whole spirit and design of the very prohibition, for the letter of which he professed so sacred a regard. It would be

easy to multiply particulars on this subject, But I only add, in the

V. and last place, That the deceitfulness of the heart appears in the highest degree, when men overlook the real motives of their conduct, and mistake the workings of their own corruptions for the fruits of the Spirit of God.

That there is such deceitfulness in the world, none can doubt, who consider the dreadful enormities that have been committed under the sacred name of religion. In many cases, it must be acknowledged, these enormities have been committed by persons who were conscious of the motives from which they acted, and who employed religion merely as an engine to attain the objects of their avarice or ambition. But in other cases it is no less certain, that men have concealed from themselves the motive of their conduct, and even mistaken the workings of their corruptions for the fruits of the Spirit of God.

Of this we have several examples in scripture. A striking instance of it occurs in the conduct of Jehu, who, when shedding the blood of Jezreel to serve the purposes of his own ambition, said exultingly to Jehonadab, *Come, see my zeal for the Lord!* It is not improbable, that at the time he imagined himself to be influenced by zeal for God, though there cannot be a doubt, that in what he did he was actuated chiefly by the love of power. Our blessed Lord forewarns his disciples, that the time should come, when whosoever killed them, would think that he did God service; in like manner as the prophet Isaiah had declared concerning the persecuted people of God in his time, *Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word. Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified.*

We are greatly shocked when we read of the dreadful persecutions which in different ages have been carried on against the faithful servants of Christ, by the blood-thirsty votaries of Rome; yet these men pretended

zeal for the glory of God: Nor is it improbable, but that many of them might so far deceive themselves, as to imagine, that they were doing God service, while shedding the blood of his saints. This is indeed the highest instance of the extreme deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart, and the most awful proof of being given up of God to a reprobate mind. But, in a lesser degree, men frequently practise this kind of deceit upon themselves, ascribing to the word and to the Spirit of God what is evidently the effect of their own ignorance, wickedness, and depravity.

On the whole, since the ways in which men deceive themselves are so various, can we be too jealous over our own hearts? *He that trusteth to his own heart*, says the wise man, *is a fool;* and the reason is obvious, because *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.* Let us therefore, Brethren, accustom ourselves to self-examination. Instead of indulging a censorious disposition, and looking abroad

to discover the faults of our neighbours, let us descend into our own breasts, and observe the plagues of our own hearts. Let us attend, not merely to our outward actions, but to the principles and motives from which these actions proceed. Let us consider our conduct, not in the light in which self-love and self-partiality would present it to our minds, but in the light in which any impartial spectator would view it, in the light in which God's word teaches us to consider it, and in the light in which it will be judged of at last, *when God shall bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of all hearts.*

We are all more or less liable to self-deceit; and they who think they have the least of it, are in general most of all under its dominion. Let us therefore distrust our own judgment, and, sensible of our own ignorance and liableness to mistake, let us pray to God for his divine teaching; saying, with Elihu in the book of Job, *That which I see not;*

teach thou me; and with the Psalmist, *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

SERMON II.

ON

THE EVIL OF SIN.

PROVERBS xiv. 9.

Fools make a mock at sin.

VARIOUS and opposite are the opinions of men on the different subjects of religion, but we know that the judgment of God is always according to truth. Men of licentious principles and of profligate manners, have often been admired by the world, as persons of superior sagacity and discernment. Their profane scoffs and impious raillery at the truths of God, have been frequently dignified with the name of *wit*, and highly applauded by persons of like dispositions with themselves. In particular, eve-

ry attempt which they have made to lessen the evil and demerit of sin, has obtained credit with the world, and if tolerably plausible, has gained to its author the wished-for reputation of wisdom. But He, whose understanding is infinite, and who sees and knows things as they really are, hath denominated them *fools* who make a mock at sin. All attempts, therefore, to lessen its evil and demerit in the estimation of men, must be as weak as they are impious. Our slight thoughts of sin must proceed from ignorance. For did we only know its nature, and consider its effects, instead of making a mock at it, our minds would be impressed with the most serious and solid apprehensions of its dreadful malignity, and fatal consequences.

I propose, my Brethren, from the words which I have read, to discourse to you on this awful, but interesting subject; and would endeavour, by the help of God, to impress your mind and my own, with a deep sense of the exceeding evil and sinful-

ness of sin. With this view I shall consider sin,

I. In its nature;

II. In its effects;

III. In the views which persons in different situations entertain of it.

From this it will appear, how justly they are said to be *fools* who make a mock at sin.

I. Let us consider sin in its nature. The qualities of certain objects are sometimes best understood by contrasting them with those to which they are opposed. Thus the evil nature of sin is most strikingly represented, by contrasting it with the character of God, against whom it is committed; and with the law of God, of which it is the transgression.

1. God is a Being of the most perfect excellence, possessed of every attribute that

can excite the admiration, love, and esteem of his intelligent creatures. He is infinitely glorious, and completely amiable; and, what in a peculiar manner renders him so, is the holiness of his nature. Holiness is the chief and brightest attribute of the Godhead. It is rather a combination of excellencies, than a distinct perfection. It is that which gives a lustre to all the perfections of God, and raises them so far above the poor imperfect resemblances of them to be found among creatures. The power, the wisdom, the justice, and even the mercy of God could not command our love and esteem, if these perfections were not always united with the most spotless holiness. God is therefore glorious in his holiness. He is infinitely excellent and infinitely lovely, because he is infinitely holy; and creatures are more or less excellent and lovely, in proportion as they are more or less conformable to the image of the divine holiness. Judge from this, therefore, what must be the odious nature of sin, which is directly opposite to the holiness of God. If God be

infinitely excellent and amiable, sin must be infinitely vile and detestable.

In this light, it is uniformly represented in Scripture, where we are told, that *God cannot look upon iniquity but with abhorrence*, that *evil cannot dwell with him, neither can fools stand in his sight*, and that *he hateth all the workers of iniquity*. Sin is rebellion against the adorable Majesty of heaven and earth. It aims at the destruction of all the perfections of God. It is directed against his power, which it defies. It is employed in opposition to the counsels of his wisdom, which it seeks to overthrow. It denies his justice; it calls in question his faithfulness; it abuses his goodness. It is particularly directed against his holiness, practically denying its existence, or saying, that it is not the lovely and adorable excellence which the word of God declares it to be. Dreadful then must be the nature of that evil which is so opposite to the character of God, and at variance with all the perfections of his nature. But let us consider the nature of sin,

2. As contrasted with the law of God, of which it is the transgression.

The law of God is a transcript of his perfections. *The law is holy*, says the Apostle, *and the commandment holy, and just, and good.* It is not only holy and just, that is, perfectly agreeable to the nature of God, and to the reason and fitness of things, but likewise good, being evidently calculated to promote the happiness of those who are subject to its authority. Were it at present necessary, every precept of the law of God might be shewn to have this tendency. But to be convinced of this, let us only attend a little to the summary which our blessed Lord hath given us of the law of God, in the two great commandments of love to God and to our neighbour. Can any thing be more reasonable, or better adapted to promote our happiness than these commandments? *To love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength*, is only requiring us to place our supreme affection on boundless excellence; than which, nothing can give greater satis-

faction to a well regulated mind. And, *to love our neighbour as ourselves*, is a rule, so consonant to right reason, so pleasant to those who practise it, and so plainly conducive to the interest and happiness of society, that there is no man but must allow its excellence, however little disposed he may be to put it in practice. Thus holy, and just, and good is the law of God. It is pure and perfect. It is evidently conducive in all its parts to the happiness of man, and bears the plainest marks, both of the wisdom and of the goodness of its blessed Author.

But sin is the transgression of this law, and must therefore contain in it a malignity and vileness proportioned to the purity and excellence of the law of God. If the law be holy, and just, and good, sin, which is the transgression of it must be inconceivably evil. If, as we have observed, the evident tendency of every precept in the law of God be to promote the happiness of men, the transgression of this law must inevitably lead to misery and woe. Sin is the greatest of evils, because it is opposite to the

greatest good. It is opposite to the nature of God, which is pure and perfect holiness; and it is likewise opposite to the will of God, as made known to us in his law, which is the unerring standard of right and wrong. How great then must the evil of sin be, which stands thus directly opposed to whatever is excellent and praise-worthy.

But not to insist longer on the abstract nature of sin, let us proceed,

II. To consider sin in its effects.

Here a much wider field opens to our view. We can say little of the nature of sin, because we are so little acquainted with the perfection of the nature and law of God; but wherever we turn our eyes, we behold the effects of sin. Within us and around us, on earth and in hell, we contemplate the baneful consequences of this mortal evil. No sorrow or misery of any kind can be named, that does not spring from this root of bitterness. It is the source of every other evil, the fruitful womb, that conceives

and brings forth all the wretchedness that is in the universe.

First of all, let us reflect on the mischief which sin has done to the angels who kept not their first estate. These, you know, were once pure and happy spirits, standing continually in the presence of God, and blest with the beatific vision of his life-giving countenance. But sin entered their blest abodes. They aspired to be like to God; they affected to be independent of their Maker; and, on account of their pride and rebellion, they were banished from heaven. And now we are told, *they are reserved in chains under darkness to the judgment of the great day*, when they shall be brought forth to receive their final and everlasting doom.

But angels are not the only creatures who exhibit to the universe the baneful effects of transgression. Man, the lord of this lower world, who was formed at first after his Maker's image, is likewise become a fallen and sinful creature. How lovely was man

at his first creation, when his understanding was clear and unclouded, his will under subjection to the will of his Maker, and all the lower appetites and passions of his nature, uniformly governed by reason and conscience! But now, what a melancholy change hath sin produced! *How is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed!* Instead of that perfect order, and delightful harmony which once prevailed, the soul of man is become the seat of various contending passions. His understanding is darkened through the ignorance and blindness of his heart, and the noblest powers of his nature are willingly enslaved by the lowest and meanest appetites. Who that properly considers this melancholy change, but must drop a tear over the ruins of human nature. Fools may make a mock at sin; but the man of serious reflection, who contemplates the fatal effects of transgression, who beholds around him a number of immortal creatures, living in the open neglect and contempt of God and religion, the slaves of divers lusts and pleasures, while he feels within himself a natural aversion to every

thing that is good, and a perpetual proneness to that which is evil, must have very awful apprehensions of the infinite evil of sin, which has thus miserably defaced one of the noblest works of God.

Every thing around us bears marks of man's fatal apostacy from God. The whole creation groaneth. The voice of lamentation is heard from every quarter. Time would fail, were I to speak of the numberless calamities, both of a public and private nature, which are the effects of sin,—of earthquakes and tempests, the famine and pestilence, the war and bloodshed, which are the common scourges of mankind,—or of the pain and poverty, the sickness and distress, and all the thousand nameless ills which fall to the lot of individuals. Let us turn our eyes to what part of the world we may, and we behold the awful effects of this deadly evil. Sin has brought a curse upon the creature, so that now vanity and vexation of spirit are inscribed in legible characters on all earthly enjoyments. The fatal poison hath spread through

every part of the visible creation of God, and embittered every cup of human bliss.

It is unnecessary to go far for instances to prove this melancholy truth. Where is the man or woman that has lived any time in the world who has not felt the bitterness of human woe? Even while I now speak, the wounds of some may be bleeding afresh, at the remembrance of some calamity that has recently befallen them. One man may be mourning the loss of a beloved friend or relation, another lamenting the decay of his substance or reputation, while a third is labouring under the effects of a frail and sickly constitution. These, and all the other evils incident to man in his present state, are the baneful effects of sin. And, to complete this catalogue of human woes, death at length arrives; death, that dreaded foe of man, who is justly stiled the king of terrors, wearing the most gloomy aspect and formidable appearance, when viewed only with the eye of sense. Death closes our eyes upon this visible world, and all its loved and valued enjoyments; it puts an

end to all our capacities and opportunities of usefulness; it seems like the destruction of our nature. The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit unto God who gave it. What contempt does death pour upon human nature! What a dark cloud does it cast over all the beauty and glory of our outward condition! The body becomes a motionless lump of clay. Death sits heavy upon it, and the sprightliness and vigour of life are perished from every feature, and from every limb. If we descend into the gloomy chambers of the grave, what do we behold! the dead lying in their cold mansions, in beds of darkness and of dust. The shadows of a long evening are stretched over them, the curtains of a deep midnight are drawn around them; *the worm is spread under them, and the worms cover them.*

All this is the effect of sin. *For the wages of sin is death*, and *by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death has passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.* We are too apt to conceive a

slight opinion of the evil of sin, because it is to be found in the best of men, and is so constant an attendant on human nature. We are not sufficiently affected with the thoughts of it, because its greatest evil is of a spiritual and invisible nature. We consider not that infinite Majesty which it dishonours, that spotless holiness which it offends, nor the glory and perfection of that law which it violates. But in the scenes of misery and death which I have now described, we may survey the sensible and mighty injury which sin has done to the nature of man, and may thence infer, how offensive it is to God.

You may think this, my Friends, a very sad and dismal picture of the effects of sin, but the half has not yet been told you. Dreadful as the effects of sin in the present life are, they are inconsiderable indeed in comparison of its effects in a future and eternal state. There *the worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.* Thence hope is for ever excluded. In hell the wicked remain the awful and eternal monuments of God's

infinite and invariable abhorrence of sin. *Who knows the power of his anger! even according to his fear, so is his wrath. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*, more fearful than it is possible for language to describe, or imagination to conceive.

And is all this the effect of sin? Are these thy baneful consequences, thou irreconcileable foe of God and man? Then by what name shall we call thee, or how shall we sufficiently detest and abhor thee? let fools make a mock at sin; but may I ever entertain the most awful impressions of its malignity and vileness. Shall I ever think, or speak lightly of that which has been productive of so much mischief, which brings with it such a train of evils in the present life, and which leads to endless, inconceivable misery in the life to come!

We now proceed, as was proposed, in the

III. and last place, To consider the views

which persons in different situations entertain of sin.

Here it may be useful to observe, the different apprehensions which men entertain of the evil of sin, according to their different moral characters. The more profligate a man becomes, the less evil he perceives in sin: and, on the contrary, the higher degrees of purity that a person is enabled to attain, the clearer and deeper will his convictions be of the guilt and danger of transgressing the law of God. It is remarkable how exactly this observation holds in every case. There is a fatal progress in vice, and the man who at first was accustomed to startle at the more open and daring violations of the law of God, by degrees becomes reconciled to the most enormous crimes, till, at last, (in the emphatical language of Scripture,) his *conscience is seared as with a hot iron*, and he seems to lose all sense of right and wrong. Persons in this state of mind perceive little or no evil in sin, and consider the most presumptuous transgressions in no other light than as harmless

or unavoidable frailties. Again, the more decent and respectable part of mankind are shocked at the grosser violations of the divine law. Their consciences are so far enlightened as to perceive and acknowledge the evil of sin, when it disturbs the peace of society, or violates some of the plainer and more obvious principles of morality. But their views are exceedingly narrow and confined. They have no just conceptions of the purity and perfection of this law, and therefore content themselves with a very partial outward observance of its precepts. Nor are they much troubled at the plagues of their hearts, nor with the sins which more immediately affect the first table of the law, if their conduct before the world be such as to procure the esteem and good will of their fellow creatures.

Far different and juster views of the evil of sin have they who are taught and enlightened by the word and Spirit of God. To them, the least offence appears an infinite evil. They have received from the sacred scriptures just and becoming ap-

prehensions of the majesty and holiness of God, and of the purity and spirituality of His law; and consequently, their minds are affected with every deviation from that perfect standard of duty. They see the baseness and ingratitude of sin, as committed against God, and bewail with deep contrition the secret and hidden evils of their hearts, as well as the open irregularities of their life and conduct. In this respect, however, we may perceive a difference, even among the children of God, who are sanctified by faith which is in Christ Jesus. Some are more humble, more tender, more sensible of the evil that is in sin than others, just in proportion to the degree in which they are conformed to the image of the divine holiness. And, if we carry this thought a little farther, we may suppose how much clearer and more affecting apprehensions of the evil of sin, those spirits must have who are dislodged from their tenements of clay, and blest with the immediate vision and enjoyment of God. As long as they remain in the present state, their judgments are clouded by remaining ignorance and corruption;

but when they are introduced into the mansions of glory, and behold the truths of God in the clear light of heaven, what astonishing views must they have of the inconceivable evil and demerit of sin. *Fools make a mock at sin*,—but saints who behold the face of God, are struck with the most serious apprehensions of its infinite malignity and vileness. *Fools make a mock at sin*,—but angels, who excel in strength, whose nature is far more noble, and whose capacities are far more comprehensive than ours, entertain very different thoughts of this fatal and deadly evil. The more holy any creature becomes, the nearer resemblance it bears to the infinitely pure and ever-blessed God, the greater evil does it perceive in sin, and the more must it approve of the awful punishment which God has annexed to the transgression of his holy law.

Such are the views which persons of different characters, and in different situations entertain of sin. But after all, it must be acknowledged, that the apprehensions of the

holiest and most enlightened creatures on this subject fall infinitely short of the reality. No finite mind can perceive in their full extent the evil nature and bitter consequences of sin. He only, whose all-comprehensive mind perceives all things at once, with all their connections and consequences, can fully know the vast extent of this baneful evil. Facts are more powerful and convincing than any reasonings: and, from the testimonies which God hath given of his awful displeasure at sin, we may judge in what an odious light it must appear in the eye of his spotless purity. In many instances he hath revealed from heaven his wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. He destroyed the old world for the wickedness of its inhabitants. He consumed the cities of the plain with fire from heaven, on account of their crying abominations. He hath denounced indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, against every soul of man that doth evil.

And what is most wonderful of all, in the very means which his infinite wisdom hath

devised for the pardon and recovery of the sinner, he hath given the strongest possible proof of his invariable abhorrence of sin. For when man had become a transgressor of the divine law, and was exposed to all the dreadful effects of God's righteous displeasure, in the unsearchable riches of his condescension and grace, He was pleased to entertain thoughts of mercy towards our fallen race. But this mercy could not be extended to guilty creatures, in a consistency with the other glorious attributes of the divine nature, without such an adequate atonement or satisfaction, as would maintain the honour of his perfections and government, and display to all intelligent creatures his infinite and invariable hatred of sin. Such an atonement the offended Majesty of heaven himself provided in the person of his own Son, one of the same nature and perfections with himself, who took upon him the likeness of sinful flesh, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Here the evil of sin is displayed in its most awful and striking colours, and God's hatred of it is declared in a more forcible manner

than if all the creatures on earth, or even all the angels in heaven, had been doomed to everlasting punishment. How great must that evil be which required such a costly sacrifice to atone for it! How deep the stain which nothing but blood of such inconceivable value could wash away! Surely the infinitely great God must perceive an infinite evil in sin, when, to testify his displeasure against it, he spared not his own Son, when standing in the room and stead of guilty men; when He, who was the Father's equal, and the Father's delight, was exposed on account of it to such inconceivable sufferings. O the unknown malignity and vileness of that accursed thing which crucified the Lord of glory! If these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? If the beloved Son of God endured all this when he bore the load of human guilt, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear, at that day when the Almighty ariseth to plead his own cause, and to vindicate the rights of his injured holiness and abused goodness.

Upon the whole, then, are they not justly said to be *fools who make a mock at sin*, whether we consider its nature as contrasted with the holy nature and perfect law of God; or observe its effects on fallen angels and fallen men, both in this world, and in a future and eternal state; or lastly, attend to the views which persons in different situations entertain of it, and to the awful proofs which the great God hath given of his infinite and invariable displeasure against it.

I shall now conclude this discourse with a few practical reflections from what has been said.

1. Let us adore the patience of God in bearing so long with a world of such sinful rebellious creatures.

O what contempt is daily poured on the authority of God, by multitudes of careless unthinking men! How is his sacred name blasphemed, and his holy law violated! How are his ordinances profaned, and even his goodness and grace grossly abused! all this

the great and adorable Majesty of heaven and earth witnesses, *for his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings.* And yet, though sin, as we have shewn, is the object of his infinite hatred and aversion, he bears with sinners. This is the day of their merciful visitation. *He is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* He waits to be gracious, and therefore he endures with much long-suffering a world of sinful rebellious creatures, till the purposes of his grace, in the salvation of all his chosen and redeemed ones be finally accomplished.

My brethren, this is not a subject of mere speculation. We are all personally and deeply interested in it; for we have all corrupted our ways, we have all gone aside, there is none righteous, no not one. So that we have all good reason to adore the patience of God, in bearing so long with us. To contemplate the evil of sin in general, will do us little service, unless we bring the matter home to ourselves, and are duly affected with

a sense of our own peculiar sinfulness. This is the proper work of a day of solemn fasting and humiliation, and the use that should be made of all that we have been hearing. Let us therefore, brethren, look into our own hearts and lives. Let us search and try our ways, and endeavour to recollect those particular instances in which we have sinned against God. Let us impartially review our past conduct, and consider our numberless offences, with all their aggravations. Let us think of our pride and impatience, our impurity and worldly mindedness, our unfruitfulness under the means of grace, and neglect of the glorious gospel, our coldness and formality in the exercises of devotion, and our omission, or careless performance of social and relative duties. From these, and such like instances of actual transgression, let us rise to the fountain of original corruption that dwells within, and then let us reflect what an evil and bitter thing sin is; how hateful in itself, and how dreadful in its consequences. Such an exercise as this, cannot fail, by the divine blessing, to give us very humbling views of ourselves,

as well as admiring thoughts of the patience and forbearance of God. Overwhelmed with the sight of such a load of guilt, we must be disposed, with somewhat of like feelings, to breathe out the Publican's prayer, *God be merciful to me a sinner.*

2. How thankfully ought we to receive the blessed remedy that God hath provided for the cure of our sinful souls.

Great beyond all conception is the evil of sin, and awful are the effects which it produces. But, blessed be God, it is not an evil without remedy: for there is balm in Gilead, and a physician there. *For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.* He came to finish transgression, to make an end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness: And, if we apply to this matchless Physician, for the cure of our diseased souls, we shall certainly experience his healing power. He is called *Jesus*, because he saves his people from their sins. He saves them from

the guilt of sin, by the merit of his atoning blood; he saves them from the power of sin, by the grace of his Holy Spirit; and none who put their trust in him, ever had cause to be ashamed of their confidence. O then, let us be persuaded, under a deep conviction of the evil and danger of sin, and of our own peculiar sinfulness, to fly for refuge to this all-sufficient Saviour. However worthless and wretched in ourselves, we are permitted, invited, and commanded to plead the worthiness of the Lamb that was slain. In him God is reconciled. He liveth to make intercession for all who come to the Father by him, and the more vile and unworthy we feel ourselves to be, the more will the Redeemer's power and grace be magnified in our salvation. Nothing is too hard for omnipotence to accomplish. Where sin hath abounded, grace hath much more abounded: *That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.*

3. Let us long for that blessed world, where sin and all its effects shall be completely destroyed.

While the saints remain on earth, sin, in a greater or less degree, still cleaves to them. They indeed truly hate and forsake it; but the flesh lusteth against the spirit, so that they cannot always do the things that they would. Besides, they live in a defiling sinful world, where they are exposed to many temptations, which too often prevail against them, and disturb their inward peace. But in a little while, this painful conflict will cease. The very being of sin shall be destroyed. Into the heavenly Jerusalem nothing that is impure shall enter. *There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.* O blessed world! where sin and all its baneful effects shall be known no more, or known only like evils and dangers that are past, to accent the songs of the redeemed, to furnish continual matter for their praise and wonder through eternity, while,

with enraptured hearts, they join in the highest ascriptions of glory and dominion, to him that hath loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and hath made them kings and priests unto God and his Father.

Who that has the joyful hope of this inconceivable blessedness, would wish to live one moment longer in this world than infinite wisdom sees meet—in *this* world, where every thing is stamped with the melancholy marks of sin—where God is so much dishonoured, the Saviour so much neglected, his ordinances so little regarded, and his people so often reviled and persecuted—where pain and wretchedness, disease and death, are seen and felt wherever we turn our eyes—and where our own wicked hearts create for us such constant trouble and uneasiness.

Blessed be God, who hath given us the hope of a better life beyond the grave. Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come. Let us pass the time

of our sojourning here in fear, and patiently wait the appointed hour of complete deliverance. *Amen.*

SERMON III.

SIN DETECTED.

NUMBERS xxxii. 23.

Be sure your sin will find you out.

THE history to which these words refer, and which is contained in the preceding part of this chapter may be thus shortly related. The children of Israel had arrived at the borders of the land of Canaan, and were about to pass over the river Jordan, to take possession of the country that had been promised them for an inheritance, when the Reubenites and Gadites, two of the twelve tribes, beholding the land of Jazer and of Gilead, and judging it to be peculiarly suited to their habits and manner of life, propo-

sed to remain on this side of the river. With this proposal Moses was displeased, chiefly because it might deprive the other tribes of their assistance in warring with those nations of Canaan which remained to be subdued. But when the Reubenites and Gadites, in order to remove this objection, declared their determination to continue with their brethren, till the land was conquered, Moses consented; only warning them not to deal deceitfully in this matter, for that God was witness to the whole transaction, ver. 20—23.

The words of the text contain a general truth of great importance; a truth which cannot be too often, or too seriously considered: *Be sure your sin will find you out.*

Most men are anxious to hide their sin, to conceal or to palliate its guilt, and to flatter themselves with the hope of peace, though they walk after the imagination of their own corrupt hearts. For this purpose various expedients are tried, and tried, alas! with too fatal success. Some, in order to

avoid the stings of conscience, have recourse to infidel principles, or, if that appear too wide a step at once, to false and erroneous sentiments in religion, which steel the mind against conviction, and render it comparatively easy in the commission of sin. Others banish as much as possible all reflection on these subjects. They plunge into company, business, or amusement, for the express purpose of driving away care; and think themselves peculiarly fortunate if they are able to succeed. A third class, not so hardened as the two former in impiety or vice, unable to divest themselves entirely of the fears of an hereafter, stifle their convictions by unavailing purposes of future amendment. In these, and many other ways, do sinners woefully deceive themselves to their everlasting ruin. If they can only succeed in concealing their guilt from themselves, or from public view, if they act with such prudence and caution as to maintain a fair and respectable character in the sight of their fellow-creatures, they are pleased and satisfied; never considering in what light they appear before HIM who seeth not as man seeth,

and to whom the secrets of all hearts are ever manifest.

But *verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth*, and *though hand join in hand, the workers of iniquity shall not go unpunished.* Sin is not that harmless trivial thing which multitudes flatter themselves it is. As certainly as there is a God who governs the world; as certainly as power, wisdom, faithfulness, justice, and holiness belong to his character, so certainly, my brethren, sin will find the sinner out. If the word of God be true, it must, it will do so, sooner or later. *Though wickedness be sweet in the mouth, and the sinner hide it under his tongue, though he spare it, and forsake it not, but keep it still within his mouth, yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it shall prove as the gall of asps within him.* Every sin which we commit, whether it be great or small, has in it the seeds of inconceivable misery, and will assuredly produce, either bitter repentance in the present life, or endless unavailing remorse in the world to come. Such is the doctrine of the text,

and of every part of Scripture; and to this solemn awakening truth, I propose at this time to call your attention. And O that it may reach the conscience of every one present! that all of us, under the effectual teaching of the Holy Spirit, may be brought to confess our guilt, to humble ourselves before God, and to apply without delay to the blessed and only remedy provided in the gospel!

I do not intend to occupy your time by proving, in an abstract manner, the truth of the proposition in the text; but shall endeavour to bring the subject home at once to your cases and to your consciences, by mentioning some of those particular seasons when sin will find the sinner out. I shall begin with those which are more especial and peculiar, and then proceed to such as are more certain and universal.

I. Sin is frequently brought to remembrance under the powerful and searching ministry of the gospel.

The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. When skilfully opened, and faithfully applied, it seldom fails to make some impression upon the minds of the hearers; and though these impressions in many cases prove transient and ineffectual, yet, blessed be God, many are the instances in which the gospel becomes the power of God unto salvation. In particular, convictions of sin are frequently produced under the ministry of the word. The preacher draws his bow at a venture; he knows not the particular state or character of many of the individuals whom he addresses; but the Spirit of God directs the arrow to the heart of this or the other hearer, just as he pleases; so that *he is judged of all, and convinced of all; and thus the secrets of his heart being made manifest, he falls down on his face and worships God, and acknowledges that God is among us of a truth.* Perhaps some particular sin is brought to the sinner's re-

membrance; a sin which he may have long ago committed, and which he may have likewise long ago forgotten. Or, the history of his past life in general may be brought under review, and the guilt of numberless transgressions, which now appear with all their horrid aggravations, may stare him in the face. Probably he wonders how the preacher knows so much of the workings of his heart, or of the transactions of his life. Every word seems particularly addressed to himself, as if there were no other person present; and he almost suspects that the speaker has been informed of circumstances relative to his character, hitherto unknown to the world. So powerful is the operation of the word of God, when applied to the conscience. Even the most hardened and secure are sometimes made to feel it. Thus when *Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.* And such was the effect of John the Baptist's faithful preaching, on the mind of Herod, that we are told *he feared John, and did many things, and heard him gladly.* In these two cases, indeed, as in many

others, the effects were merely temporary, and unproductive of any good fruit. The love of sin proved too powerful, and triumphed over their feeble resolutions of amendment. But still, the cases prove the truth of our assertion, that under the powerful and searching ministry of the word, sin will find the sinner out. O happy case! when the arrows of conviction take such fast hold of the conscience, that nothing but the peace-speaking blood of Christ can heal the wound! May this be the case with every unconverted sinner who hears me this day! May the Lord open your hearts as he opened the heart of Lydia, to attend unto the things which are spoken; and if your sin has never found you out before, may it now be discovered to you, in all its malignity and vileness, that seeing your danger, you may, like the manslayer pursued by the avenger of blood, speedily flee to the city of refuge. But still the complaint of the prophet may be made, *Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?* The preacher's words are to many like *a lovely song of one that hath a plea-*

sant voice and can play well on an instrument, for they hear his words, but they do them not.

But the Lord has many ways of awakening the consciences of men, besides the ministry of the word, or, at least, in subserviency to it. And therefore I mention, as another season when sin finds the sinner out,

II. The season of sickness.

This is frequently a time of serious reflection. Separated from the busy crowd, and rendered incapable of attending to his ordinary cares and employments, the man who is visited with sickness has time and opportunity for considering his ways. Things then are generally not beheld in the same light, in which they are viewed in the time of health, when the animal spirits are brisk and lively, and every thing around wears a fair and smiling appearance. And, in particular, sin then assumes quite a different aspect from what it had in the moments of

gaiety and thoughtless dissipation. In some cases, disease is the proper and natural effect of particular sins. In every case it is the fruit of our original apostacy from God. And how often has God been pleased to awaken in the sinner's conscience a sense of sin, by means of some sharp or threatening illness, so that he has been forced to exclaim, *There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger, neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me.* Psal. xxxviii. 3, 4. Yes, I do remember my faults this day: this and the other sin that I have done lies heavy on my conscience. It gave me little uneasiness at the time I committed it, for my heart, my foolish and depraved heart was hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. But now the veil is removed; the false glare in which passion and fancy represented objects to my mind has disappeared, and I now see the guilt and the folly of my past conduct. Many faithful sermons, long ago heard, to which I paid little attention at the time, are

now fresh in my remembrance. Many kind and salutary admonitions, which I once treated with neglect and scorn, are now forced on my recollection. Alas! *how have I hated instruction and my heart despised reproof! and I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.*

My Brethren, these are not imaginary scenes. Those who are accustomed to visit sick beds have occasion to know, that in fact they are often realized. Many, indeed, are awfully hardened under God's afflicting hand, and continue as insensible as ever to the evil and demerit of sin, even *while their bones are chastened with pain, and the multitude of their bones with strong pain;* exhibiting a striking proof of the total inefficacy of means, without the concurring influence of divine grace. Yet, on the other hand, there are comfortable instances of persons who have resisted every mean of conviction, being savingly awakened in the time

of sickness. More instances, however, it is to be feared, occur, of persons being partially awakened, and considerably softened in time of trouble, who, upon the return of health, have relapsed into their former security and carelessness about their souls. Be sure, however, that sooner or later your sin will find you out. It may be in the time of sickness, in the hour of calm and sober reflection; and happy will it be, if the discovery be made while time and opportunity are given for repentance; before the door of mercy be shut, and the awful sentence be past, *He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still.*

III. The truth declared in the text is frequently exemplified in those various adverse changes which occur in human life.

We are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Besides bodily sickness, the different conditions and relations in which we are placed in the world, prove, in the course of providence, the occasion of suffering to the

children of men. In situations of this kind, iniquity is often brought to the remembrance, and impressed on the conscience of the sinner. We have a striking instance of this in the history of Joseph's brethren, recorded with such inimitable simplicity and beauty in the sacred page. Long after they had sold their brother into Egypt, when the memory of it was almost obliterated from their minds, a seemingly adverse dispensation of providence awakens their recollection, and brings their treachery and unkindness to Joseph, full in their view. *And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us; and we would not hear: therefore is this distress come upon us.* And again, *What shall we say unto my Lord—what shall we speak—or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants.*

The history of David furnishes another striking instance of the same instructive truth. After his lamentable fall, David continued for a long time in a state of awful in-

sensibility. While his outward circumstances prospered, he seems to have had no idea of the greatness of his sin. Living in affluence and ease, he went on frowardly in the way of his heart, and perhaps secretly congratulated himself on having escaped detection. But when the prophet Nathan was sent to rouse his conscience to a sense of guilt, after assuring him that the Lord had put away his sin, that is, cancelled its guilt, or granted him forgiveness, he foretells, at the same time, several great and grievous calamities which should befal him, as tokens of God's displeasure; every one of which would, doubtless, contribute to bring his sin to remembrance. First of all, the child begotten in adultery is smitten with sickness, and cut off by death; an affliction, in which David did not fail to perceive the hand of a justly offended God. Next, Tamar his daughter is defiled by her own brother Amnon; in revenge for which, Amnon is cruelly and treacherously slain by Absalom. To fill up the measure of his sufferings, Absalom, his darling son, his beloved Absalom, rises in rebellion against his too indulgent

Father, and dies in the very act of rebellion, with all his crimes and follies on his head. How much David's heart was softened under these accumulated distresses, and how clearly he saw in them the punishment of his iniquity, appears from his language on a very trying occasion, when by Absalom's rebellion he was forced to fly from Jerusalem, and, with a few faithful attendants, to pass over the brook Kedron. *Carry back*, said he to Zadok the high priest, (2 Sam. xv. 25, 26.) *the ark of God into the city; if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it and his habitation. But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.*

Have we not, my Friends, in the course of our own experience and observation, witnessed cases very similar to these? Have we not known persons of reputed piety, who, in the season of outward prosperity, have discovered no small degree of sinful conformity to the world; and whose con-

duct in general, so far from adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour, has been stained with many blemishes, which have grieved the hearts of the godly, and brought reproach upon the good ways of the Lord? Have we not seen them backsliding from God in spite of faithful warnings and admonitions, promising themselves peace when there was no peace, till, by means of some sharp and rousing affliction, their sin has found them out. Then with tears of penitential sorrow and unfeigned regret, we have heard them confess their guilt, bewail their backslidings, and bless the kind hand, which, by means of seasonable correction, has recovered them from their sinful wanderings.

May not this, Brethren, have been the case with some who now hear me? or, at least, are there not some of you, who in less palpable deviations from duty, have been brought back to God by means of affliction? You secretly cherished some idol in your hearts, which marred your comfort, and interrupted your communion with

God. You were guilty of inordinate attachment to the creature, and gave to some other object that place in your affections which belongs to God only. Perhaps you were not aware of it at the time, till, by the removal of the idol, God detected and discovered your guilt, and then, with shame and self-condemnation, you were constrained to acknowledge, that your sin had found you out.

Hitherto I have mentioned some of those more special seasons and situations, in which sin finds the sinner out, and in which the discovery, however painful, may, by the blessing of God, prove salutary to the soul. But I proceed to speak of two other seasons, more certain and universal, in which the effects, in general, are not so comfortable.

If then neither the faithful ministry of the word, nor sickness, nor adversity prove effectual for this purpose, I add,

IV. That the near approach of death often rouses the sinner's conscience, and dis-

covers him to himself in his real character.

At this awful season, every disguise is commonly removed; those refuges of lies, which formerly kept alive a presumptuous hope, are swept away, and the sinner finds himself on the brink of eternity, without any well grounded confidence in God; nay, with the fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation from his presence. I know, indeed, that in very many cases, sinners die as they have lived, in a state of thoughtless security, or hardened impenitence. Some are cut off suddenly, without having any opportunity afforded them for serious reflection. They pass at once from a state of abused worldly prosperity, into a state of endless inconceivable misery: *There are no bands in their death, but their strength is firm.* Others, who die of lingering diseases, flatter themselves to the last with the hope of recovery; and through the cruel mistaken kindness of friends, are never allowed to admit a thought of death or eternity. But there are instances, and

these, perhaps, more numerous than many suppose, of persons dying under the horrors of an awakened conscience; alarmed, but not converted; convinced, but not changed. When such cases do happen, as I am persuaded they not unfrequently do, especially in those places where the gospel is most purely and faithfully preached, the greatest pains are taken to conceal them from public notice; or, admitting the facts, to ascribe them to other causes than those which really produce them, such as disease, the delirium of fever, or a gloomy distempered imagination.

But however easy it may be to view death at a distance, the near approach of it can scarcely fail to excite alarming apprehensions, in the breasts of those who are not brutishly ignorant, or awfully hardened. The certain and immediate prospect of passing into eternity, of entering on an unknown and unchangeable state of being, of appearing before the great and omniscient God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and from whose awful and impartial deci-

sion there lies no appeal, nor any possibility of escape, how serious and solemn! How overwhelming the thought, when the mind is capable of reflection, and in full possession of its faculties! Sin must then appear to the unpardoned sinner, in a very different light, from what it ever did before. Innumerable instances of vicious habits indulged, of duties neglected or slightly performed, of privileges misimproved, and of mercies ungratefully abused, recur to his memory; and, amidst the agonies of dissolving nature, harrow up his soul. Should it be suggested to his mind in these awful moments, that God is merciful,—this suggestion, which formerly served to cherish a false delusive hope, and to render him secure in the commission of sin, so far from yielding comfort, greatly heightens and aggravates his distress. "Yes," (might he say, if able to express his feelings in words,) "God is merciful—but I have undervalued, "slighted, and abused his mercy. God is "merciful—but he is likewise just to punish "the workers of iniquity; and how can I "escape his deserved vengeance, who have

" all my life long neglected his great salva-
" tion."

Of all the delusions by which the god of this world blinds the minds of them that believe not, the trusting to a death-bed repentance is surely one of the greatest. How uncertain! how dreadfully precarious! The *possibility* of it, none who regard the authority of God's word can deny; but how rare are the instances, and how unlikely, that those who sin under this presumption will ever be visited with God's salvation! Even Christians, who are pardoned and accepted by God, may suffer on their death-bed very awful rebukes on account of the prevalence of some particular sin, or the general untenderness and inconstancy of their walk. Their sin may find them out, at a time when they stand most in need of divine support and consolation; and they may be left to mourn under the hidings of God's face, in painful uncertainty about their state, when, had they walked more closely with God, they might have been edifying and instructing their fellow Christians. Ah! little do we think, when

we are guilty of sinful compliances, when we indulge a worldly spirit, or neglect the opportunities of doing good which we have in our power, that we may be scattering thorns on our dying pillow, and perhaps clouding our evidences for heaven in those moments when ten thousand worlds will appear as nothing, in comparison of one smile of God's reconciled countenance.

V. I have only to mention, as another season, when, if not before, sin will infallibly find the sinner out—The judgment of the great day.

God hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness. This is the uniform doctrine of scripture, and various appearances in the present state of the world concur in proving the certainty of this great and solemn event. In particular, the power of conscience, in cases which are not cognisable by human laws, shews, that there is a witness above, *whose eyes are upon the ways of men, and who seeth all his goings*, to whom the greatest, as well as

the meanest of mankind are accountable. Think not then, poor sinner, that thou canst escape the judgment of God. The terrors of his word thou mayest affect to brave; his threatnings may fail to alarm, and his promises to allure thy stupid and obdurate heart; even the most striking and awakening dispensations of providence may be disregarded and despised by thee. Death itself may possibly approach without creating any great alarm; and, supported by some mistaken view of the character of God, thou mayest go down to the grave with a lie in thy right hand—but still, *be sure your sin will find you out.* It must, it will do so, if not before, at least at the judgment seat of Christ, *when God will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of every heart.* And ah! how dreadful to think of never being undeceived, till death has sealed thine everlasting doom; of never seeing thy true state and character, till placed beyond the reach of recovery, in a world of endless misery, when *he that made thee will not have mercy on*

thee, and he that formed thee will shew thee no favour.

There is something very solemn and striking in the account given us in the seventh chapter of Joshua, of the discovery of Achan's sin. He had stolen a golden wedge, with some other articles, which he hid in the earth, in the midst of his tent, hoping thereby to escape detection. But though no human eye was witness to Achan's crime, God beheld it, and by his express command, the offender is called forth to suffer deserved punishment. For this purpose all the tribes of Israel are assembled together, and each tribe, with every particular family and household belonging to it passes under review, till at last, the guilty person is singled out, confesses his guilt, and receives the punishment due to his crime. An instructive emblem this of what we shall all witness, when the Son of man shall come again *in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory;* when *he shall sit upon his throne, and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them*

one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. Then shall every man be judged according to his works. Sin, however carefully concealed, however artfully coloured over by plausible pretexts, will then find the sinner out. The guilty person, whoever he is, or whatever station he may have occupied upon earth, shall then be called forth to judgment, and the most secret crime he has ever committed shall be detected and exposed before assembled worlds. No apologies for sin will then be admitted, for the Judge is omniscient, and knows the secrets of all hearts. No attempt to escape the punishment of iniquity will then be possible, for the Judge is omnipotent, and can easily put in execution his most tremendous threatnings. In vain will impenitent transgressors *cry to the rocks and to the mountains to fall on them, and to hide them from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.* The day of recompence is fully come, when *he will render to every man according to his deeds; and all shall know*

that it is He who searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men.

Is it then so indubitably certain, that sooner or later sin will find the sinner out, how dreadful the infatuation of multitudes, who go on secure from day to day, under the guilt of innumerable transgressions! The practical language of many is, *The Lord doth not see, neither doth the God of Jacob regard it.* But how vain and groundless is such an expectation! *There is nothing secret that shall not be made manifest, neither any thing hid that shall not be known.* He who searcheth Jerusalem as with lighted candles, can easily pierce through the thickest disguise. *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.* If a man should sow cockle in his field instead of barley, and after all expect to reap the same kind of crop with his neighbour who sowed good seed, we

should pity his folly, or suppose him out of his senses. It matters little whether any one saw him while he sowed his field, the harvest will soon discover the absurdity of his conduct. Far more egregious is the folly and madness of that man who expects to find peace in the ways of sin; who sows to the flesh, and yet hopes to reap life everlasting. The present life is our seed-time. We are sowing for eternity. The harvest is approaching, when we shall reap according to the nature of the seed that we have sown, whether it be to the flesh or to the Spirit.

My dear hearers, we are all deeply interested in this subject. Our sins are many, they are highly aggravated, they expose us to certain and inevitable destruction. Let us not wait, then, till our sin find us out. This it *will* do, but it *may* be too late, and therefore let us all, without delay, endeavour to find our sins out, that in the exercise of true repentance and faith in the blood of Christ, we may apply to God for his pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace.

Nor let any of us flatter ourselves with the hope that our sins are pardoned, merely because we confess that we are poor sinners, and have learned to say, God have mercy on us. This many do, who are evidently strangers to *the forgiveness that is with God.* Nay, many are encouraged to go on in sin, from partial, confused, and mistaken ideas of gospel grace. But that is not the genuine gospel which gives the least encouragement to sin. If we hold fast our transgressions, and refuse to let them go, or, if while we pretend to be sorry for our sins, we secretly indulge them in our hearts, and are at no pains to avoid the temptations which lead to them, it is a plain evidence, that our hearts are not right with God, that our guilt is still unpardoned, and that we are yet in our sins. True godly sorrow is known by its fruits. It produces unfeigned hatred of sin, habitual watchfulness against it, a holy fear of offending God, and an uniform desire and endeavour to please him. If we have obtained redemption through the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of all our sins, according to the riches of his grace, sin shall

no longer have dominion over us. We may mourn over its prevalence, but we shall no longer be subject to its power. We may feel its inward workings, but we shall be made daily to watch, and pray, and strive against it. Brethren, is it thus with you? Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves. The heart is deceitful. Let this make you distrustful of yourselves, and lead you to pray with the Psalmist, *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

An opportunity is again afforded us of approaching the table of the Lord*. Let none who are living in open or in secret sin venture to approach it. Let none imagine that the partaking of the bread and wine, will make atonement for their sins, or settle accounts with God. Fatal mistake! dread-

* This Sermon appears to have been preached on a day of humiliation before dispensing the Lord's Supper.

ful perversion of the ordinance! But let every humble, penitent, believing sinner renew his application to the blood of sprinkling, and come to receive the pledges of the Redeemer's love.

SERMON IV.

ON

REPENTANCE.

MARK vi. 12.

And they went out, and preached that men should repent.

IN these words we are presented with a summary account of the doctrine preached by the Apostles, in consequence of the instructions which they received from their divine Master. Jesus having chosen twelve of his followers to be his constant attendants, began to send them out by two and two, to preach in the surrounding cities and villages, that by means of their instructions, the minds of his countrymen might be prepared for receiving the glad tidings of the

gospel, which were soon to be published to them, and to all nations. And here we are told, that when they went out upon this important mission, they *preached that men should repent.*

The doctrine of repentance, my Brethren, holds a distinguished place in the system of divine truth contained in the scriptures. Nor is this to be wondered at, if we consider, that the gospel is adapted to the circumstances, not of innocent, but of sinful creatures. Moses and the prophets frequently inculcated the necessity of repentance. It was the substance of John the Baptist's ministry. *Repent ye*, said that great preacher of righteousness to his hearers of every description, *for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* Such also was the doctrine which our Lord himself preached to those who attended his public ministry. *Repent*, he said, *and believe the gospel.* And in the instructions which he delivered to his apostles, when he commissioned them to preach the gospel, it was expressly enjoined, that *repentance and remission of*

sins should be preached in his name among all nations. That the apostles were faithful in the discharge of this important trust, appears from the words of Peter on the memorable day of Pentecost, when they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. Addressing the convinced Jews, he thus exhorts them, *Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins:* and afterwards, *Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.* The Apostle Paul speaks of *repentance from dead works* as one of the first principles of the doctrine of Christ; and, when giving a summary of his doctrine before the elders of Ephesus, he comprehends the whole under the two great articles of Repentance and Faith; *Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.*

A doctrine so important, and so frequently insisted upon in the sacred writings, has surely a claim to our most serious consider-

ation. Let me entreat you then to listen with attention, while I endeavour,

I. To explain the nature of true repentance.

II. To point out its indispensible necessity.

III. To mention some motives and encouragements, to incite you to the performance of this duty.

I. The nature of true repentance.

There are two words in the New Testament, which are rendered in our version *repentance*; the one * denoting *after-carefulness*, the other † *a change of mind*, of judgment, and disposition. Without consuming your time in a critical examination of the words, I would only observe, that both these ideas are included in true repentance. Before, however, proceeding direct-

* μεταμελεια. † μετανοια.

ly to explain its nature, it may be proper to premise two observations to prevent some mistakes on this subject, into which many have fallen.

1. I would remark, that repentance is represented in scripture, both as the gift of God, and as the duty of the sinner. It is the gift of God, for *every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights. Jesus is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.* Without the concurring influence of divine grace, the best and most likely means will prove ineffectual. Such is the deep depravity of human nature, such our total alienation from the life of God, that no power, but that which made us at first, can form us anew after the divine image, or change the heart of stone into a heart of flesh. But, at the same time, repentance is the sinner's duty, and certain means are appointed, in the use of which, God is pleased to communicate his grace. It is the sinner's duty to consider his ways, and to turn

from sin unto God. It is his duty to read and hear the word of God with reverence and attention, to meditate upon the truths of Scripture, above all, to pray to God for the effectual teaching of his Spirit, in dependence upon his faithful promise, that he will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him. These two things, that repentance is the gift of God, and, at the same time, the duty of the sinner, are in themselves perfectly consistent with one another, and it is our ignorance only that leads us to suppose any incongruity between them. I would,

2. Remark, that true repentance is inseparably connected with faith in Jesus Christ.

Whether faith or repentance has the precedency in the order of nature, is a point about which different opinions have been formed. This, however, I apprehend, is not of such importance as some have supposed. Faith and repentance are equally the effects of the regenerating grace of God, nor is it possible to conceive a moment of time in

which the one exists in the soul separate from the other. An *impenitent believer*, or an *unbelieving penitent*, are expressions alike contradictory and absurd. On the one hand, it is certain, that without some conviction of the evil and demerit of sin, there can be no true faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ; for our Lord himself declares, *They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.* On the other hand, it is equally certain, that sin is never truly hated nor forsaken, till we obtain some comforting discoveries of the forgiveness that is with God. There is an awakening of the conscience, which generally precedes the comfort which the sinner derives from the gospel. But this, strictly speaking, is not repentance, though it may lead to it. It is only when we can *look on him whom we have pierced* by our sins, that we mourn after a godly sort. This, and this alone, melts the soul into genuine contrition, and breaks asunder the adamantine chains by which the sinner is kept in bondage. There is a conviction of danger, that excites the trembling soul to flee to the Saviour for re-

fuge, and this by some may be called repentance, but the evil nature and bitter consequences of sin are never truly perceived, nor felt, till Jesus become the object of our confidence, and hope, and till we learn to estimate the greatness of our guilt, by the value of the price that was paid for our redemption.

Having made these preliminary observations, I proceed to explain more distinctly the nature of true repentance.

1. We may consider repentance as including a genuine sorrow for sin.

There is a sorrow for sin which is not connected with repentance, and which many have felt who are still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. A man may be deeply affected with the consequences of his sin, while he sees no evil in sin itself, nor feels any hatred against it. He may be concerned for the injury it has done to his health, his reputation, or his worldly interest. Nay, he may be seriously and

greatly alarmed at the danger to which it will expose him in a future and eternal world. Yet all the while he regards iniquity in his heart, and continues to practise it in his life. Such a sorrow as this, partakes in no degree of the nature of true repentance. It is not indeed so properly a sorrow for sin, as a dread of the punishment that attends it. The sinner is sorry, not that he hath sinned, but that God is so infinitely just and holy as to mark his iniquity; and so powerful, that nothing can prevent the execution of his threatenings: he is grieved, not that he has transgressed the law of God, but that this law is so pure and spiritual as to take cognisance of his thoughts and intentions, as well as of his words and actions; and however deeply he may be affected, though he may make many promises of amendment, and even shed abundance of tears, it is not so much on account of the intrinsic evil, as of the fearful consequences of sin.

It is possible also, that one may be deeply grieved for some particular transgressions, who is yet a stranger to true repentance.

Thus, Judas repented of his betraying Christ, confessed his guilt, restored the thirty pieces of silver, and most earnestly wished that the crime had never been committed; nay, so deep was his remorse, that he could not bear the reproaches of his own conscience, but went and hanged himself. But that he was no true penitent is evident from our Lord's words, *It had been good for that man that he had not been born.* Nor does it appear, that with all the concern he expressed for betraying innocent blood, he felt any remorse for his hypocrisy, his covetousness, and other sins in which he had long indulged. The same thing frequently happens in the case of murderers and others, who are guilty of flagrant breaches of the law of God. They are inexpressibly troubled on account of one particular act of violence committed against a fellow-creature, while, perhaps, they feel no concern for all the ingratitude, contempt, and rebellion of which they have been guilty against their Maker. This is nothing else than the effect of natural conscience; God having been pleased to preserve such a

measure of light in the conscience, even in the present corrupted state of human nature, as frequently serves to restrain wicked men from those crimes which would endanger the peace and welfare of Society.

Very different from both these kinds of sorrow, is that which accompanies genuine repentance. This is a *godly* sorrow. It has a principal and direct reference to God. The true penitent mourns for sin after a godly sort. He is chiefly concerned for sin as it is committed against God, and as it is a violation of his holy and righteous law: *Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.* It is true his conscience is alarmed with the terrors of the Lord; but this is not the only, nor even the chief spring of his sorrow. When he contemplates the majesty, the glory, and perfection of the God whom he hath offended, he is grieved at the dishonour done to his name. When he reflects on the purity and excellence of that law which he has so often and so daringly broken, his mind is filled with shame and sorrow. Especially

when he thinks of the goodness of God in sparing him so long in the world, notwithstanding his daily and aggravated rebellion, and of the bounties of divine providence, so liberally bestowed, and so ungratefully abused: above all, when he contemplates the riches of divine grace manifested in Christ Jesus; even that grace, which has produced in his darkened and perplexed soul some pleasing hope of forgiveness, how is his soul filled with the deepest regret for his past conduct, and how readily does he subscribe to the justice of the sentence which condemns him, while, with self-abhorrence and self-condemnation, he breathes out the publican's prayer, *God be merciful to me a sinner!*

Nor is it only for a few of his more flagrant transgressions that he is thus affected. No; he mourns over all, and every one of them without exception, those that are more secret, as well as those which have been open; sins of omission, as well as of commission; sins which have the sanction of custom and fashion, as well as those which

are odious in the eyes of the world. The more he is enlightened to see the glory of God, the more deeply is his mind affected with the number and greatness of his transgressions. And because all the sins he has committed, whether in heart or life, are the effects of an originally depraved nature, he traces back the streams of actual transgression to this polluted fountain, acknowledging with the Psalmist, *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.* Genuine sorrow for sin never fails to be accompanied with very humbling apprehensions of ourselves. Whatever opinion the penitent sinner may have formerly entertained of his own character, no sooner does he feel the influence of true repentance, than he sinks in his own esteem, and renounces all his own righteousness as filthy rags. His high imaginations are cast down, and so far from thinking that his repentance can merit any thing at the hand of God, he mourns over its defects. He is ashamed that he is so little affected, and abhors himself on account of the remaining hardness and insensibility of his heart.

Such were the feelings of Job, when he obtained a clearer discovery of the majesty and holiness of God: *I have heard of thee*, says he, *by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*

2. True repentance includes in it an unreserved and ingenuous confession of sin.

This is the natural consequence of a genuine sorrow for sin; for confession is nothing else than the outward expression of those inward sentiments, which constitute the temper of a real penitent. *I acknowledged my sin unto thee*, says the Psalmist, *and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.* Corresponding to this is the account given of returning Ephraim, (Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.) in which we discern all the genuine characters of true repentance. *I have surely heard Ephraim bemouning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the*

yoke; turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned I repented; and after that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.

By confessing our sins we give glory to God, as well as take shame to ourselves. We give God the glory of those divine perfections which sin dishonours. Thus Joshua exhorted Achan, *My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him.* This is a point so plain, as hardly to stand in need of any illustration; yet it may be proper to observe, that secret sins require only secret confession unto God; but public offences require a public acknowledgment, that, in the sight of others, we may openly honour that God by our confession, whom we have openly dishonoured by our conduct. Thus David, after his shameful conduct in the matter of Uriah, composed the fifty-first Psalm, in which he acknowledged his guilt, gave glo-

ry to God, and stopped the mouths of the ungodly, who had taken occasion from his conduct to blaspheme.

It is impossible in every instance, to undo the evil which we have done by sin; but the true penitent, whose confession of sin is sincere, will endeavour, to the utmost of his power, to counteract the evil consequences of his former conduct. In particular, he will make ample restitution, if in any instance he has defrauded or injured his neighbour. Under the ceremonial law, the trespass offering was to be accompanied with restitution to the injured party, (Lev. vi. 1—7.) To this institution, we find an obvious allusion in our Lord's sermon on the mount, Matth. v. 23, 24. *Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*

Thus, Zaccheus gave evidence of the sincerity of his repentance. *Behold*, said he, *Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and, if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.* In like manner, every true penitent will be disposed, to the utmost of his power, to repair any injury which he may have done to his neighbour's reputation, and good name, as well as to his property. Nor will he be backward to retract any false principles or opinions, by which, in the days of his ignorance, he may have corrupted or misled any of his fellow-creatures. I have only to add,

3. That true repentance includes in it a firm purpose, through divine grace, to walk in newness of life—a purpose, that is proved to be sincere, by the fruits which it produces.

This is the chief circumstance which distinguishes a true, from a false repentance. Godly sorrow is not so properly repentance itself, as that which produces it. Repentance is the turning of the heart from sin unto God,

and is accompanied with a blessed change in the temper and conversation; and whatever fails to produce this effect, call it by what name you please, is not that repentance which is unto salvation. Unless the drunkard, therefore, become sober, and the unclean person chaste; unless the covetous man become liberal, and the profane swearer devout; unless the passionate man become meek, and the proud humble; in short, unless a man be enabled, in some measure, to overcome his favourite and predominant iniquity, his pretensions to repentance are groundless and vain. I acknowledge, indeed, that the true penitent is far from having attained complete deliverance from sin. He still finds *a law in his members warring against the law of his mind;* and that often *when he would do good, evil is present with him.* Hence he finds occasion, every day, for the renewed exercise of repentance, and faith in the blood of sprinkling. But with all his imperfections, and short-comings in duty, he is conscious of being delivered, in some measure, from the dominion of iniquity; he aims at universal

and unreserved subjection to the will of God; and he feels in his heart, as well as exemplifies in his conduct, the blessed fruits of repentance, described by the Apostle in 2 Cor. vii. 11. *For, behold, this self same thing that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.* I come now, as was proposed,

II. To point out the indispensible necessity of repentance.

Some of my hearers may perhaps be ready to think, that in this part of the subject they have little or no immediate concern. They flatter themselves they have not been guilty of any flagrant transgressions of the law of God; and, as to lesser faults, they trust that a merciful God will not be severe to mark them. It is of importance, therefore, to point out the indispensible necessi-

ty of genuine repentance. Our labour will be lost, our attempts to describe the feelings and actings of true penitence will be to no purpose, unless men are convinced that they need repentance. For this purpose, then, consider,

1. That *all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*

This is the doctrine of scripture, and universal experience and observation abundantly confirm its truth. *There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not.* Here it is unnecessary to inquire, what sort of character you have maintained in the sight of your fellow-creatures; whether you have been moral or immoral, sober or profligate, decent or profane. Allowing all that can be said in your favour, I hope to be able to shew, from the word of God, that you stand in need of repentance.

You must acknowledge, then, that the law, which God hath given for the direction of your conduct, is holy, and just, and good.

It is founded in the perfections of his nature, and is a transcript of his moral image. It is just and equitable in all its demands, and calculated, in every respect, to promote our happiness. Though perfectly pure and holy, it is not unreasonable in any thing it enjoins. It requires us *to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; and our neighbour as ourselves.* Will any presume to say that this is unreasonable? or could it possibly have demanded less? But besides, the law of God makes no allowance for that disinclination to obedience, that moral indisposition for loving and serving God with *all* our powers, which constitutes the temper of every sinner, and, every degree of which is enmity against God. In this view the law admits of no abatement, but expressly declares, *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.*

Bring your temper and conduct then, my brethren, to the test of this perfect and

infallible standard. Judge of your actions, and of the principles and motives from which they proceed, not by the opinions and maxims of the world, not by the self-flattering views which we are all too apt to entertain of our own character, but by the oracles of the living God—by that pure and spiritual law, which is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Consider that the commandments of God are exceeding broad, reaching, not only to the outward conduct, but to the inward frame, and disposition of the heart. With this standard in your eye, recollect the different periods of your past life. Think of the advantages you have enjoyed, above many of your fellow-creatures. Have you feared and loved God your Maker as you ought to have done? On the contrary, did you not discover, in the very earliest period of life, a strong disinclination to the love and service of your Creator? If it cannot be said, that God was not in *all* your thoughts, yet in how few of them has he been, compared with the ten thousand thousand vain, unprofitable, and wicked thoughts which have found ready access in-

to your minds? If you have bowed the knee to God, have you prayed in the spirit of true devotion? or rather, does not conscience bear witness, that you have offered to your Maker cold, formal, and hypocritical services? How have you abused the day which God hath set apart for his immediate worship and service? Can you truly say, that the Sabbath hath been *your delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable?* or, on the contrary, has not much of your precious time on that day been trifled away in vain company, or idle conversation? I will not suppose, that you have been guilty of gross or scandalous breaches of the second table of the law. I shall take it for granted that you are not extortioners, nor unjust, nor adulterers. But, my Brethren, have you, in every instance, done unto others, as you would, that they, in like circumstances, should do unto you? Have you been faithful and conscientious in discharging the duties belonging to your different stations and relations in society? and, in doing so, have you had a respect to the authority of God,

and not merely to your own interest, will, and pleasure?

By following out this inquiry, in all its different branches, you will, under the influence and direction of the word and Spirit of God, soon perceive, that however amiable and respectable your character may be, in the eye of man, you are guilty, condemned criminals in the sight of God; and, that without repentance, and faith in the blood of sprinkling, you must be completely and for ever wretched.

2. The necessity of repentance appears from the express command of God, and particularly, from the awful threatenings, denounced against the finally impenitent.

The Scriptures declare, that *God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death.*—*The wrath of God*, says the apostle, *is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and*

unrighteousness of men. Hence, when addressing the Athenians, who had erected an altar to THE UNKNOWN GOD, he said to them, *The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.* Acts xvii. 30, 31. The words of our Lord to this purpose are express and decisive, *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

Clear and convincing, however, as the words of Scripture are, to those who respect its divine authority, it has been the business of the great adversary of souls, from the beginning of the world, to persuade men that they may sin with impunity. *Ye shall not surely die,* was the temptation by which he deceived our first parents: and the same stratagem has been, alas! too successfully employed, to the ruin of many souls. The great deceiver knows well, that nothing so

effectually increases the number of the damned, as the disbelief of eternal damnation; and, therefore, against this awakening truth, his strongest batteries have been planted in every age. But let no man deceive you with vain words. If there be any meaning in language, if the most solemn and repeated declarations be entitled to our serious attention, if the Bible be what we believe it to be, the faithful word of HIM who cannot lie, then it is certain, that *The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment.—To them, who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality*, God will render *eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.*

Without repentance there is no forgiveness of sin. *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy. If*

we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Without repentance there can be no true holiness; for humility, and poverty of spirit, which are essential ingredients in the nature of true repentance, are virtues, of the first importance in the Christian character.—And finally, without repentance there can be no meetness for heaven. An impenitent sinner is altogether unfit for the enjoyments of the heavenly state. Possessed of proud, unsanctified dispositions, the glories of heaven, which fill with rapture the souls of the Redeemed, could afford him no satisfaction. The objects to be found in those blissful mansions, are in no respect suited to the taste of his carnal, unrenewed mind. *Except ye be converted*, then, *and become as little children, ye shall not*, ye cannot *enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

A sinner who lives and dies without repentance, is termed by the apostle, *a vessel of wrath, fitted to destruction.* However

much he may have flattered himself in his iniquity, saying in his heart, *I shall have peace, though I walk after the imagination of my own heart*, yet, when death, that unwelcome messenger, comes to summon him into the eternal world, he will find himself awfully disappointed. He will then know, alas! when it is too late, that those objects, which he has pursued as substantial good, have been delusive phantoms, while the things which he once treated as idle tales, are great and dreadful realities. Awaking, as out of a dream, he will begin to see his sins in their true colours, and to lament, with hopeless and unavailing regret, the seasons of grace, and the opportunities of salvation which he once enjoyed, but which are now past—never to return. Like the rich man in the parable, who in hell lift up his eyes, being in torments, and could not obtain so much as a drop of water to cool his tongue, the impenitent sinner shall wish, but wish in vain, to obtain deliverance from his sufferings, or even the least mitigation of them: Doomed to pass a wretched eternity, in bitter reproaches, and self-condemnation,

heightened by the reflection, that, by a timely repentance, and faith in a crucified Saviour, all this misery might have been prevented.

You see then, my Brethren, the necessity, the absolute necessity of repentance, if ever you expect to escape the displeasure of your offended God. And, now, may I not hope, that some sinners in Zion are afraid, and that fearfulness surprises the hypocrite; for *who can dwell with devouring fire, who can dwell with everlasting burnings?* But is there any hope, are not some ready to exclaim, that such sinners as we are, who have misimproved so many privileges, abused so many mercies, and lived so long in the neglect of our souls, and of salvation, shall obtain mercy from God? Yes, my Brethren, there is. And this naturally brings me to mention,

III. Some motives, and encouragements to the performance of this duty.

1. The very call, and command to repent, may afford encouragement to returning sinners. There is no such command given to the angels who kept not their first estate. For them, no Saviour is provided; and, therefore, how much cause soever they have for repentance, they have neither motive, nor encouragement to the performance of this duty. Such a command, coming from an offended Sovereign to his rebellious subjects, could not fail to excite a hope in their breasts, that the prince who required their submission, was disposed to exercise clemency towards them. On this ground, the Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah; *Who can tell*, said they, *if God will turn, and repent; and turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not.* But, blessed be God, we are not left to uncertain conjecture, nor to hopes built on obscure and scattered hints in the word of God, amounting to nothing more than this, *It may be the Lord will be gracious.* For, I add,

2. That the word of God is full of the

most encouraging declarations, and express promises to penitent sinners.

It contains the most encouraging declarations.—It assures us, that *the Lord God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and ready to forgive:* that *he will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever. All things are of God,* (says the apostle, 2 Cor. v. 18—20.) *who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*

But, without enumerating the many passages of Scripture that might be quoted, let me only solicit your attention to a very remarkable one, which seems to have been left on record, for the purpose of encouraging penitent sinners to hope in the mercy of God: I mean, the parable of the prodigal son. As soon as the poor prodigal

came to himself, and began to entertain thoughts of returning to his father's house, ashamed and grieved at the recollection of his past misconduct, he scarce knew how to come into his father's presence, or in what way to order his speech before him. But observe how the indulgent father removes all his difficulties, and even prevents his wishes. *When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.* Instead of upbraiding him with his ingratitude, he bids his servants *bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. For this my son,* says he, *was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.* See here, my Brethren, the tender compassion of our heavenly Father, and his infinite willingness to receive returning sinners.

But, besides these encouraging declarations, there are many express promises in the word of God to penitent sinners, under the titles of *Mourners, Poor in Spirit, Broken Hearted, Humble*, and the like.

Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

But, in order to prevent mistakes, it is necessary to observe here, that repentance does not, in any degree, entitle us to the blessings of salvation; nor has it any influence in procuring these blessings from God. It is true, God does not pardon any sinner

without repentance, but neither does he pardon any on account of it. In the forgiveness of sin, he has respect solely and exclusively to the atonement of Christ, on account of which, without any other consideration whatever, *he is just, in justifying the ungodly who believe in Jesus.* That penitence which is trusted in for acceptance with God, is not the repentance wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit, but a proud pharisaical repentance which needs to be repented of. Do not imagine, then, that your prayers, or your tears can atone for your past guilt, or recommend you to the divine favour: nor think that it is presumption to trust in the Saviour, unless you can feel those sentiments which you have been taught to consider as necessary to true repentance. The design of the Spirit of God in working repentance in the soul of a sinner, is just the reverse of what many suppose. It is not to furnish any ground of confidence before God. It is not to make us think that we have any better plea, than others, for mercy and grace. But it is to destroy the natural pride of our hearts. It is

to make us sensible, that, in point of acceptance with God, we stand upon a footing with the poorest and vilest of our fellow-sinners; and that we have nothing, and can do nothing, to obtain the favour of our Maker. This humbling truth, no impenitent sinner is disposed to admit, and the conviction of it is essential to the repentance which is necessary, to prepare the heart for receiving the glad tidings of the gospel.

3. The examples recorded in scripture, of sinners who obtained mercy, notwithstanding the peculiar greatness of their guilt, may afford another motive and encouragement to repentance.

Such were Manasseh—the thief upon the cross—Mary Magdalene—Saul the persecutor—and some of the very men who crucified the Prince of Life. These instances are recorded, not to encourage any to go on in a course of iniquity, but to shew us, that none who are sincerely desirous to forsake their sins, and turn to the Lord, need despair of mercy, on account of the num-

ber, or greatness of their former transgressions. Our Lord, indeed, speaks of some who sin against the Holy Ghost, whose sin shall not be forgiven. But, as it is impossible to renew such to repentance, what is said respecting them ought not to discourage the trembling penitent soul. Let persons of this last description, consider for their comfort, the boundless extent of divine mercy, and be assured, that all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven, *for the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.*

4. In the last place, let the unspeakable happiness which awaits the true penitent, in a future and eternal world, be improved as a motive and encouragement to repentance.

Even in the present life, the penitent sinner is not without comfort. *Being justified by faith, he has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* As the heart knoweth its own bitterness, so there is a joy, with which a stranger cannot intermeddle. Even the tears of repentance are mingled with inexpressible delight; and the true pe-

nitent, in mourning for sin, enjoys a purer and higher satisfaction, than he ever found in all the boasted pleasures of the world. But it is in heaven only that the mourners in Zion shall be fully comforted. There, *they who have sowed in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*

O blessed day! when sin, with all its bitter effects, shall be for ever done away—when the voice of lamentation shall be heard no more—when temptation, affliction, and remaining corruption, the great sources of uneasiness to the people of God in the present state, shall be completely removed—and when the ransomed of the Lord, who were led on with weeping and supplications, *shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

I shall now conclude this Discourse, with a short address to two different classes of hearers.

1. To those who are in danger of delaying repentance, from a presumptuous confidence that they shall have time enough for it afterwards.

Persons in the season of youth, and in the bloom of health, are in peculiar danger from this fatal snare. The delusion, however, is by no means confined to them, for it pervades all ages, and all conditions. Ah! thoughtless infatuated fellow-mortals, how long will you be duped by this stale artifice? How many are now in hell, who once intended, as much as you do, to repent, but who delayed it from time to time, till their race was run, and their eyes were closed in the shadows of eternal death. Like Felix, perhaps, *they trembled;* but saying to their convictions, as he said to Paul, *Go your way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for you,* they lost that opportunity, and never saw their ruin-

ous mistake till it was too late. Consider, I beseech you, that repentance is not in your own power. It is, as you have heard, the gift of God; and have you not reason to fear, that by stifling conviction, you may provoke the divine displeasure. Though God may call, even at the eleventh hour, yet nothing can be more dangerous and foolish, than to trust to an uncertain hereafter. *To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, lest he swear in his wrath that ye shall not enter into his rest.*

2. To those who are tempted to think it is now too late to repent; that their day of grace is past, and the door of mercy for ever shut against them.

This is a mistake no less dangerous than the other. Poor sinners! give no heed to the tempter's lying suggestions. However long you may have lived without God, and without hope in the world, if now, at last, you are convinced of your folly and sinfulness, and of your need of the Saviour's

grace, despair not of mercy. Apply instantly, and earnestly to the blood of sprinkling. *Look unto me*, says the compassionate Redeemer, *and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.* He assures you of a gracious welcome; *Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.* It is daring, and must be highly provoking in the sight of God, to delay repentance on the presumption of obtaining mercy at last; but it is no less displeasing to him to despair of his mercy, after the declarations he hath made, and especially after the proof he hath given of his boundless love to sinners, in *not sparing his own Son, but delivering him up for us.* Wherefore, *seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

SERMON V.

THE GOSPEL INVITATION.

REV. xxii. 17.

And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.

THESE words contain one of the fullest displays of the riches and freeness of divine grace that is to be found in the sacred writings; and, as they occur at the close of the inspired volume, they may be considered as a concluding exhortation, addressed to sinners in every country and age of the world. *The Spirit and the Bride*

say, Come. The Spirit, by whom the scriptures were indited, and by whose inspiration *holy men of old spake*, says, by the mouth of prophets and apostles, *Come—Hear, and your souls shall live—Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon—Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.* With these invitations, the Spirit also concurs by his gracious influences on the heart.

And the Bride says, Come;—that is, the Church, who is called in this book *the Lamb's Wife*, and who is espoused as a chaste virgin unto Christ. She joins with the Spirit in these gracious invitations. To the church are committed the oracles of God; and the ministers of the churches are from time to time sent forth, as heralds, to proclaim to men the Redeemer's boundless compassion, and infinite readiness to receive returning sinners.

And let him that heareth say, Come.—Let every one who hears and obeys the voice of Christ in the gospel, echo back the voice of sovereign mercy, and invite others to share with him in the unsearchable riches of Christ, saying, "Come, my fellow-sinners, "be no longer faithless, but believing; ac- "cept the blessings of salvation; and rejoice "in the manifestations of the Saviour's love. "From comfortable experience we can as- "sure you, that these blessings are as free- "ly bestowed as they are freely offered."

And let him that is athirst come.—He who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness—he who is labouring and heavy laden—he who is ardently longing after happiness, but cannot find it in the broken and empty cisterns of creature comforts, let him come to Jesus, and he shall have all his wants supplied, and the desires of his heart completely satisfied.

And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.—Lest any should think themselves excluded by the former invita-

tion—lest any poor convinced sinner should suppose that he was not the person whose soul was properly athirst for the blessings of salvation, it is here extended, so as to take in every case, and to silence every objection which unbelief, fruitful in apologies for itself, can possibly suggest. *Whosoever will*—whatever his former character may have been, however great his present guilt and unworthiness are—*let him take the water of life freely.*

Having thus shortly explained the words of the text, I propose in what follows,

I. To point out some of those inestimable blessings of which we are here invited to partake.

II. To explain the extent of the invitation; and particularly, to shew the absolute freeness with which these blessings are bestowed on all who are willing to receive them.

I. I propose to point out some of those inestimable blessings of which we are here invited to partake.

The blessings of the gospel are spoken of in the text under the general and comprehensive name of "The Water of Life." *Whosoever will, let him take the Water of Life freely.* Water is a very common, and favourite metaphor with the sacred writers, when speaking of the blessings of salvation. *When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and streams in the midst of the vallies. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.—Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.* In similar language, our Saviour speaks, when describing the same blessings; *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood, and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.* And in like manner he addresses the woman

of Samaria, *If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life.*

No blessing is more necessary than water to the sustenance of life; nothing commonly is less valued; yet there is nothing, of the want of which we are sooner sensible. In the warm and sultry regions of Judea, where this invaluable comfort was often scarce, and difficult to be procured, the metaphor must have appeared with peculiar force and beauty. But whether men are sensible of it or not, sure we are, that water is not more necessary to the sustenance of our bodies, than the blessings of the gospel are to the life of our souls. The gospel is truly *living water*, more refreshing to the weary soul, than the cooling draught to the traveller parched with thirst. Its

blessings are exactly suited to the wants and distresses of poor guilty sinners. To shew how necessary and important they are, I shall now mention a few of them.

1. The pardon of sin.

This I mention first, not only because it is a blessing of inestimable value, but because it lies at the foundation of all the rest, and is indispensibly necessary to the enjoyment of true and solid happiness. While sin is unpardoned, and guilt lies on the conscience, nothing in heaven or on earth can ease the troubled mind. To abide under the wrath of the Almighty, to be continually exposed to the just and everlasting displeasure of him who made us, must appear inexpressibly awful to every reflecting person. Like the hand-writing which appeared to Belshazzar in the midst of his feast, it must embitter all the pleasures of life, and cause trembling and astonishment to seize the awakened sinner. But *blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered. Blessed is the*

man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.

This, my Brethren, is the blessedness which the gospel proposes, and of which we are here invited so freely to partake. The gospel lays a solid foundation for the enjoyment of this blessedness. It reveals God as reconciled by the death of his Son. It informs us of this gladdening, of this peace-inspiring truth, that *God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses.* It assures us, that *if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. For the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin.* How reviving and comforting to the mind of the awakened sinner is this discovery! To be assured from the word of God, that *there is forgiveness with him;* that every obstruction is removed out of the way of our reconciliation to God; that *though our sins be as scarlet,* through the blood of his dear Son, *they shall be*

white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Come, therefore, ye labouring, heavy laden sinners, to Jesus the Saviour, for this inestimable blessing. He invites you to partake of it, without money, and without price. He himself has paid the ransom. Nor can any thing prevent your enjoyment of this unspeakably precious blessing, but an obstinate rejection of his rich redeeming mercy. To every penitent believing sinner, he addresses these comfortable words, *Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.*

2. Another blessing offered in the gospel, and of which we are here invited to partake, is the sanctification of our corrupted nature.

Not only has sin brought guilt upon the conscience, and exposed us to the awful curse, and eternal wrath of God, but it has likewise vitiated all the powers of our souls, and rendered us the miserable slaves of our own headstrong and unruly passions. No

captivity is so disgraceful as the bondage of sin; no pollution so loathsome as that which defiles the conscience. As there can be no true enjoyment under a sense of unpardoned guilt, so neither can there be any so long as sin retains its dominion in the soul, and the enslaved sinner is led captive by the devil at his will. Accordingly, the salvation which the gospel offers, is not a partial, but a complete salvation. It includes deliverance from the power and pollution, as well as from the guilt and punishment of sin. It is designed to make us holy, as well as happy; nay, to make us holy, in order that we may be happy. For it is impossible to conceive any degree of permanent happiness, unconnected with inward purity; nor does the gospel give the least countenance to any joy, that has a tendency to relax the obligations of holiness.

Come then, ye weary and heavy laden sinners, who are groaning under the bondage of corruption, to you the gospel brings a glorious deliverance. It is admirably fitted to purify, refine, and ennoble your souls;

to elevate them above the grovelling pleasures of sin, and exalt them to higher and more dignified pursuits. Jesus invites you to aspire after sublimer objects than any which this world can bestow. He is able to heal all the diseases of your nature. He can cure you of your pride, your sensuality, your covetousness, and earthly-mindedness. He can subdue the most powerful corruptions of the human heart, overcome the most inveterate habits, and implant the graces of his Spirit in the souls, where sin and Satan ruled before, with uncontrouled dominion. Only commit your souls to the government of his grace, and the guidance of his Spirit, and you shall experience his all-conquering power.

3. Access to God, and communion with him in the ordinances of his grace, is another blessing of which we are here invited to partake.

The value of this blessing can be known by those only who have tasted its sweetness. Pure and satisfying are the joys of a

pious and devout mind. When retired from the world, with no eye upon him but that of his God, the Christian holds fellowship with his heavenly Father. When he turns over the sacred page, and there reads with astonishment and delight, the counsels of heaven respecting the salvation of guilty perishing man; the exceeding great and precious promises which God hath given him; and the returns of love and gratitude which all this kindness demands—when his thoughts take a wider range, and he meditates on the boundless variety of objects which nature, providence, and grace, present to his mind—when he pours out his soul in the humble confidence of faith, and spreads before his heavenly Father, his wants and cares, his sins and sorrows, his fears, and hopes, and joys—what inexpressible satisfaction diffuses itself through his soul, and with what pity and contempt does he look down on the mean, sordid pleasures of worldly men, which, in comparison of those which he enjoys, are like the crackling of thorns under a pot. Or, when he mingles with his fellow-saints; when he comes to

the house of God, and joins in the solemn acts of social worship; when with meekness he receives the ingrafted word of truth; when he offers up with the congregation the fervent and united prayer, or lifts his cheerful voice in praises to their common Father and God; or, when in more retired converse with a few Christian friends, he talks of the things which belong to their peace, till their hearts burn within them; or, when in a more public and solemn manner he holds communion with his Saviour and all the faithful, in the holy ordinance of the Supper,—in all these exercises he experiences a pleasure with which strangers do not intermeddle; nay, often a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.

Now, my Brethren, the gospel invites you to partake of all this happiness. It removes the distance which sin has made betwixt a pure and holy God, and a guilty polluted soul. It brings those who were afar off nigh by the blood of Christ. It gives us access to the holiest of all, and opens a way, not only *to the altar of God*, but *unto God*

himself as *our exceeding joy. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand.*

Come then, ye who *spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not. Hearken diligently* unto Christ, *and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.* I shall only add,

4. That victory over death, and the sure hope of eternal life, belong to the blessings of which we are here invited to partake.

Whatever pleasures worldly men may boast of, there are none of them that reach beyond the grave. Death puts an end to all their schemes and pursuits, to all their hopes and joys. To say the least, it affords to them nothing but a dreary, melancholy prospect; a vast, unknown, uncertain futurity, in which they cannot tell how it shall fare with them, or what shall become of

them. On this account, men who are strangers to religion endeavour to banish the thought of death as much as possible from their minds; and, by means of business and amusement, they in general so far succeed, as to keep themselves tolerably easy and secure, except in the hour of sickness and of danger, when, in spite of their utmost endeavours, the prospect of this frightful messenger frequently occasions the most dreadful apprehensions.

But the gospel, my Friends, delivers from the fear of death. It destroys this bane of human happiness, not by banishing the thought of it from the mind, but by opening up such prospects beyond it, as completely change its nature, and render it the object of desire. The gospel brings life and immortality to light. It assures us, that Christ, by dying and rising again, *hath destroyed death, and him that had the power of death.* It discloses unutterable joys beyond the grave, in that blessed world to which he will bring, in due time, all his faithful followers. It teaches believers to

consider death as the entrance into life eternal; and, though the path be gloomy, it will assuredly lead them to the regions of everlasting day; though the passage may be stormy, it will infallibly bring them safe to the peaceful shore of Immanuel's happy land.

Come then, my Friends, embrace this blessed gospel, which presents such bright and boundless prospects to our view. Trust in that almighty Saviour, who has conquered death, and secured the victory to all who believe in his name. He will receive your souls at death into his own blissful presence, and in the morning of the resurrection, even *these vile bodies*, which must soon become the food of worms, *shall be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working of that mighty power, whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.* Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, *Death is swallowed up in victory. O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength*

of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. I proceed now, as was proposed,

II. To explain the extent of the invitation, and particularly to shew the absolute freeness with which the blessings of the gospel are bestowed on all who are willing to receive them.

The extent of the invitation is expressed in these words, *Whosoever will.* This gives encouragement to every returning sinner who feels his need of mercy, and is willing to receive the blessings of salvation, whatever his former character, or however great, numerous, and highly aggravated his offences in the sight of God may have been. None are excluded from partaking of the blessings of salvation, but those who exclude themselves. The water of life is freely bestowed on every one who is willing to receive it.

This is a precious, and most comfortable truth. It is the glory of the Christian scheme, the hope of sinners, and the song of the Redeemed before the throne. It is the uniform doctrine of the Scriptures, and particularly conspicuous in every page of the New Testament. It was frequently the subject of our Lord's discourses. He taught, that in point of acceptance with God, the Jew and the Greek, the poor and the rich, the decent and the profligate, are precisely on the same footing. And because many of the Jews, on account of their peculiar privileges, trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others, he said to them in plain terms, (Matt. xxi. 31.) *Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you.* On another occasion, he solemnly assured them, that *they shall come from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God, while the children of the kingdom are thrust out.* When he was in the house of Simon the Pharisee, a woman that was a sinner came

into the house, and began to wash his feet with her tears, and to wipe them with the hairs of her head. Instead of reproving her, or forbidding her approach, he kindly encouraged and comforted her, by declaring, that *her sins, which were many, were forgiven her;* at the same time telling the proud Pharisee, that *because much had been forgiven her, therefore she loved much.* So remarkable was this conduct of our blessed Lord, that his enemies called him, by way of reproach, *The Friend of publicans and sinners.* Nor did the merciful Saviour disdain the appellation: *They that are whole,* he said, *need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

How often do we find him, in the course of his public ministry, inviting sinners of every description to come to him for the blessings of salvation. *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.* And, for the encouragement of all, he declares, that none

who come to him shall be rejected. *Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.* "In no wise,"—that is, on no account whatever, be his sins ever so numerous, or his guilt ever so aggravated. Nay, we find him complaining, with the tenderest pity, of the unwillingness of sinners to come to him. *Ye will not come to me,* he said, *that ye might have life. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.* To crown the whole, such was the compassion of our great and gracious Redeemer, that he laid down his life upon a cross, as a ransom for many; declaring with his dying breath, *It is finished;* and displaying, in the midst of the greatest sufferings, the boundless extent of his grace, by extending mercy to a penitent thief who was crucified along with him, and praying for his very murderers in these astonishing words, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

When our blessed Lord rose again from the dead, he discovered still more plainly, the nature of his kingdom, and the extent of that salvation which he had procured by his obedience unto death, by commissioning his apostles to teach and baptize all nations, and to preach the gospel to every creature. Accordingly, we find the apostles, after the ascension of their Lord, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, publishing the glad tidings of salvation in the name of a crucified and risen Saviour; and declaring to all who heard them, that they who believe in his name, are justified from all things, and shall never come into condemnation.

Every one who is tolerably acquainted with the writings of the apostles, particularly with the epistles of Paul, and who reads them with any degree of candour, and freedom from prejudice, must be sensible, that the doctrine which the apostles taught, was, like that of their great Master, the doctrine of free grace. How fully and clearly does Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, vin-

dicate and explain this doctrine in his epistles to the Romans and Galatians, as well as in other parts of his writings. He there lays it down as a certain and undeniable truth, that *all have sinned and come short of the glory of God;* that, in consequence of this, *the whole world is become guilty before God;* so that *there is none righteous, no not one.* From which he draws this evident conclusion, that *by the deeds of the law,* that is, by our own works or performances of any kind, *no flesh living can be justified in the sight of God.* Having thus shut up all hope from any other quarter, the apostle proceeds to unfold the gospel method of salvation, in all its grace and glory, its fulness and freeness. He declares, that *the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, is unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference, being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. To him that worketh, is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt; but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith*

is counted for righteousness. And again, *Therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace. If there had been a law which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise, by faith of Jesus, might be given to them that believe.*

This is the doctrine of free grace, the ancient apostolic gospel, which excludes all boasting, denies any merit or worthiness to the creature, and ascribes the whole of our salvation, from first to last, to the sovereign mercy of God, and the all-perfect redemption of Jesus Christ. Here a sure and broad foundation is laid for the sinner's hope, suited to every case, and able to support in the utmost extremity. All are invited to partake of blessings, to which none have any superior claim above their fellow-sinners; and all who receive them, receive them in the same way, *without money, and without price.*

Nor is there any danger that this doctrine, so reviving to the mind of the awakened sinner, should prove unfriendly to the interests of morality, by opening a wide door to licentiousness. The apostle foresaw this objection, and has answered it; *What then*, says he, *shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?* The doctrine of grace may be abused by those who do not rightly understand its nature or feel its influence; but when properly understood, and cordially believed, it will not fail to produce the fruits of universal holiness. Good works, though they are neither the cause, nor the condition of our acceptance with God, are the necessary fruits and effects of it. Salvation is freely bestowed by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; but this salvation, it ought to be remembered, includes in it deliverance from sin, as well as from punishment; and a disposition to obey the will of God, as well as a title to future happiness. To conceal, then, or to limit the freeness of the gospel

offer, from fear of the abuse that may be made of it, is presuming to be wiser than God. It is unfaithfulness to his testimony, to join any thing whatever with the righteousness of Christ, as the ground of a sinner's justification before God. And it is cruelty to the souls of men, to withhold from their view the unsearchable riches of Christ, and the boundless extent of his grace. *For this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save even the chief of sinners.*

I conclude all that hath now been said, with a full and explicit declaration of the freeness of this salvation which the gospel reveals. *The Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come.* Hearken, ye stout hearted and rebellious, that are far from righteousness;—hearken, ye aged sinners, and ye young;—hearken, ye proud self-righteous Pharisees, who are vainly compassing yourselves about with sparks of your own kindling;—and, ye open, daring trangressors, who are proclaim-

ing your sins as Sodom, and your wickedness as Gomorrha—unto you is the word of this salvation sent—to every one of you without exception, of every name, character, and description. *Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.* There is salvation in Christ for all, for the very chief of sinners, *and there is salvation in none other. He that believeth shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.* Submit then to the righteousness of God. Believe his threatenings. Believe his promises. Take sanctuary from the wrath to come under the covert of the Redeemer's wings. *And ye, beloved,* who know the grace of God, *building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. Amen.*

SERMON VI.

CHRISTIAN BENEVOLENCE,

RECOMMENDED AND ENFORCED BY THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST *.

MATT. ix. 13.

But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

CHRISTIANITY is a system of the most perfect benevolence. As it originated in the pure unmerited love of God, and was established in the world, with the brightest possible display of divine mercy and grace;

* Preached before the Edinburgh Philanthropic Society, January 11. 1798.

so it inspires all those who become partakers of its blessings with a portion of the same spirit. Peace on earth, and good-will to men, mark its progress wherever its genuine influence is felt. By means of Christianity the sphere of human beneficence is greatly enlarged. The gospel teaches us to consider every man as our neighbour: It breaks down the partition walls which passion and prejudice have reared betwixt man and man: It inculcates love to all, even to our very enemies; commanding and inclining us *to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them which despitefully use, and persecute us*. Nor are the exertions of Christian benevolence confined only to the bodily wants, or to the temporal interests of mankind. The man who is actuated by its godlike spirit, aims at something higher; and, sensible how vastly superior the concerns of the soul, and the interests of eternity are to the things which relate only to a present life, his chief attention is employed about the means of promoting the spiritual benefit, and eternal salvation of his fellow-creatures. In

this generous design, the distinctions of rank, of party, and even of character, are overlooked. None, however poor, or abandoned, or despised by the world, are excluded from the Christian's compassion, or deemed unworthy of his benevolent regard; on the contrary, the more wretched the circumstances of any of his fellow-creatures appear, the greater is their claim, in his opinion, to the exertions of Christian benevolence; and, while he feels the most settled hatred and detestation of sin, he cannot but at the same time mourn over and pity the sinner.

Such is the nature of true Christian benevolence; such the mercy recommended in the text, and enforced by no less an example than that of Christ himself. The occasion upon which our Lord spoke these words we learn from the ninth verse of this chapter: *And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom; and he saith unto him, Follow me: and he arose and followed him.* Matthew was engaged in a

profession reckoned most odious among the Jews, and generally held by persons of the worst character. He was a publican, or tax-gatherer; that is, he exacted from his countrymen the tribute imposed on them by the Roman government, to which they were at this time under subjection. As the office itself was extremely unpopular among the Jews, who submitted with great reluctance to the Roman yoke, it was rendered still more so by the fraud and extortion of those who exercised it: yet, from among this number, Christ selected one of his disciples, whom afterwards he appointed to the office of apostle. And, as a farther proof of his condescension, he sat down to eat with a number of publicans and sinners, whom Matthew had probably invited to his house, that they, as well as himself, might enjoy the benefit of his divine instructions. This circumstance, as might have been expected, gave offence to the Pharisees; who, pretending to more than ordinary strictness in ceremonial observances, and trusting in themselves that they were righteous, despised others. With affected

surprise, but with real scorn and contempt, they inquire of the disciples of Jesus, *Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?* The reply which Christ made (for he did not leave it to his disciples, who at this time were but imperfectly acquainted with the nature of his kingdom, to defend his cause), while it expresses his adorable condescension, strongly marks the character of his religion: *But when Jesus heard that, he said, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

Standing in this place to plead the cause of a poor and wretched class of fellow-creatures, who are in general considered as outcasts of Society, I cannot conceive any subject better fitted to excite compassion, or to remove prejudices from our minds, than these memorable words of our blessed Lord, spoken in pity to those whose characters bear a strong resemblance to theirs. With

this object in view, I shall direct your attention,

I. To the great pattern of Christian benevolence which our Lord here proposes in his own example, *I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.*

II. To the influence which this consideration ought to have, in leading us to shew mercy to our fellow-sinners.

I. In entering upon this subject, it is pleasing to remark the inseparable connection which the wisdom of God hath established betwixt the doctrines and duties of our holy religion. There is no doctrine of Christianity that has not a practical tendency; nor is there any precept which is not enforced by evangelical motives. Our blessed Lord, in recommending compassion to the souls of men, proposes his own example; and for this purpose declares the great end of his coming into the world, which was not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.

Two things naturally present themselves to our minds in reading these words: 1. The character of the persons whom Christ came to save; and, 2. His gracious design in coming to save them.

1. The character of the persons whom Christ came to save—not the *righteous*, but *sinners*.

To those who have been accustomed to consider the gospel as a mere system of morals, enforced by the sanction of rewards and punishments, and designed barely to regulate and reform the outward manners of mankind, such a view as is here given of our state and character in the sight of God, may appear strange. If, as some suppose, we were only feeble and imperfect creatures, standing in need, it is true, of divine direction and assistance, but possessed of powers for the performance of our duty, which only require cultivation; and apt to deviate from the paths of virtue, not so much from a perverse disposition of mind, as from a weakness of nature inseparable from humani-

ty,—if such, I say, were our character and circumstances, it is not easy to conceive for what purpose the Son of God should have come down from heaven to earth, led a life of pain and poverty, reproach and persecution, and at last submitted to the death of the cross. None of the works of God are in vain. In the various productions of nature, and in the extensive operations of providence, we perceive evident marks of the most consummate wisdom and design. And can we suppose, that the greatest of all the works of God, *in which he hath abounded towards us, in all wisdom and prudence*, should not have an object in view suited to its grandeur and importance? No; it cannot be. *If there had been a law which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.* Had not the condition of man, as a fallen creature, been as completely helpless as it is miserable, so as to render it impossible for him to recover the lost favour and image of his Maker by any merit or power of his own; we may be bold to say, those astonishing means would not have been employed which are now ma-

nifested in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ.

But instead of the self-flattering views which the pretended sons of wisdom give of the dignity of human nature, and of the all-sufficient powers of man, the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise, by faith of Jesus Christ, might be given to them that believe. *The whole world is become guilty before God; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. They are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none righteous, no, not one.* In conformity to these declarations, which perfectly accord with universal experience and observation, we are told by Christ himself, that *the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.* And his apostles testify, that *when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly;* that *he suffered the just for the unjust, to bring us to God;* and *was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.* Thus all

boasting is excluded; every mouth is stopped; the proud distinctions upon which men are apt to value themselves are levelled to the ground; the decent and the profligate stand upon a footing in point of acceptance with God; *The same Lord over all, appears rich in mercy unto all that call upon him; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.*

Nothing is easier than to acknowledge in words that we are sinners in the sight of God. Many who make this acknowledgment, too plainly discover that they know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm. They confess themselves sinners, but their hearts are unbroken on account of sin. They seem to have no abiding conviction of its evil nature or dangerous consequences; and would highly resent it as an unpardonable affront, if faithfully told what is virtually implied in their own acknowledgment. They confess themselves sinners; but, at the same time, they thank God they are not as other men. They have never been guilty of gross

immoralities; their characters have always been respectable in the eyes of the world; they have, upon the whole, been punctual in their attendance upon the ordinances of religion; nor have they ever been charged, with any flagrant violation of the duties belonging to their several stations and relations in society.—So far it is well. Such characters are worthy of esteem; they may be valuable members of society, and in many respects, useful to their fellow-creatures; but still remember, *one thing is lacking*, without which the most admired accomplishments, and boasted virtues, are of no avail in the sight of God. Jesus Christ *came not to call the righteous*,—that is, those who are so in their own estimation,—*but sinners to repentance:* and unless you have a deep conviction that you are indeed sinners, guilty, condemned criminals, and vile polluted creatures, in the eyes of your great Judge, you have neither part nor lot in the blessings of Christ's salvation.

To promote this conviction, so needful and so salutary, let me entreat you, my

Brethren, instead of taking your rule of judging from the maxims and manners of the world around you, to bring your actions, and the principles and motives from which they proceed, to the standard of God's pure and holy law; which, being founded in the nature and perfections of God, must continue unchangeable. So long as you measure yourselves by others like yourselves, and compare your conduct with that of the great bulk of mankind, it is certain you must err in the judgment you form of your own characters. The fondness and partiality which every one feels for himself, will always furnish some ground for self-complacency: But place yourselves as in the presence of God; recollect his spotless purity, and the awful scrutiny which every part of your conduct shall one day undergo by Him, *who is the great searcher of hearts, and knoweth all things.*—In making this solemn review, you will find that the commandments of God are exceeding broad, reaching not only to the outward conduct, but to the inward thoughts and dispositions of the heart; so that those very actions of

your lives, which have been most highly esteemed among men, when weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, will be found wanting. Conscious of guilt, covered with shame, and stripped of every self-righteous plea; if your eyes are indeed opened, instead of the boasting language of the Pharisee, you will be disposed to cry with the Publican, *God be merciful to me a sinner!* You will join with the prophet in acknowledging, *we are all before thee as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags;* and pray with the Psalmist, *Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O God; for in thy sight can no flesh living be justified.*

Such then is the character of the persons whom Christ came to save.

2. His design in coming into the world, is to bring such to repentance.

To call sinners to repentance!—what a noble and glorious design! how worthy of the Son of God! and how admirably adapt-

ed to our circumstances, as guilty, depraved, and ruined creatures! *To raise the poor out of the dust, and to lift the needy from the dung-hill, to set them with princes, even with the princes of his people;* to restore immortal creatures, formed originally after the image, and designed for the service and glory of their Creator; endowed with powers and capacities which assimilate them to angels, the highest orders of intelligent beings; but fallen from their primitive dignity, lost to every thing excellent and praise-worthy, and sunk, by low earthly pursuits, to a level with the brutes that perish—to restore such, I say, to their original glory and felicity, to bring them back to the favour and enjoyment of their Maker, to inspire their souls with the love of God and of goodness, to render them happy in their own minds, and blessings to all around them; and, finally, to prepare them for higher services, and nobler enjoyments in the heavenly world, where sin, and all the effects of it shall be for ever done away—these are the great and glorious objects which the gospel proposes; and these objects it never fails to accom-

plish in all those who are brought under its influence.

To call sinners to repentance, is here said to be the great design of Christ's coming into the world; because repentance is the first step of the sinner's recovery to God; expressing in general, that blessed change which takes place in his mind, when, *delivered from the power of darkness, he is translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son*. Genuine repentance is always accompanied with a living faith in the gospel. It naturally flows from it, and is maintained and cherished in the soul by those awful, yet pleasing discoveries of the character of God which the gospel exhibits. *Looking on him whom we have pierced* by our transgressions, we learn, not only *to mourn*, but to hate and forsake those sins, to atone for the guilt of which, the Lord of life and glory suffered and died.

Such, in general is the nature of true repentance—of that repentance which Jesus is exalted as a Prince and Saviour to be-

stow. The effects produced by it are such as evidently prove it to be the work of God. The man who before was a slave to divers lusts and pleasures, carried into every kind of wickedness by his own headstrong and unruly passions, and led captive by the devil at his will, is now brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Being made *free by the Son of God, he is free indeed.* Before this time, perhaps, he frequently attempted to break the chains in which he was bound. Tasting the bitterness of iniquity, perceiving the ruinous effects of indulged vicious habits on his health, his fortune, or his character, he often resolved that he would no longer pursue the paths which lead down to the chambers of death. But, alas! the force of temptation soon overpowered the strength of his resolutions. Now, however, a most astonishing change is felt. What all the wit and wisdom of man, the rules of philosophy, the lessons of morality, and his own most vigorous purposes and endeavours never could effect, the power of the gospel has accomplished. It has subdued the most invete-

rate habits of sin, conquered the most ungovernable passions, and changed the very picture of the devil into the lovely image of God. *Old things are passed away, and all things are become new.* The drunkard becomes sober, the unclean person chaste, the profane swearer devout, the covetous man liberal, and the proud self-righteous Pharisee a humble believer in the grace of the gospel. The power of sin is destroyed; its dominion in the soul is overthrown; and the true penitent begins to hate those things which formerly he loved, and to love and delight in those things which before were the objects of his strongest aversion.

The call to repentance is addressed to sinners universally, without exception; *for God hath commanded all men every where to repent.* The most moral, respectable, and amiable of mankind, cannot be saved without it; and the most guilty, worthless, and abandoned of our fellow-creatures, will not be rejected if truly possessed of it. *Know ye not*, says the apostle, (1 Cor. vi. 9—11.) *that the unrighteous shall not in-*

herit the kingdom of God. Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. Persons of the characters here described, who live and die impenitent, are evidently excluded from any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. But the apostle adds, *And such* WERE *some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.* The scripture abounds with instances of some of the greatest sinners who have obtained mercy. At present I shall select two, which appear peculiarly well suited to the occasion of our meeting. The first is the instance of Zaccheus, who, from a rapacious publican, became a genuine disciple of Christ. This man, it should seem, from mere motives of curiosity, climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Jesus, who was to pass that way. Judge how great his surprise must have been, when Jesus coming to

the place where he was, looked up, and like one who had long been acquainted with him, addressed him in these words: *Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house.* The word of Christ was accompanied with power; for at once Zaccheus obeyed the Saviour's call, and received him joyfully, not only into his house, but his heart. And as an evidence of the happy change which divine grace had wrought in the disposition of his mind, he declares, *Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.* The other instance of the Saviour's power and grace, not less remarkable than the former, is that of the woman which was a sinner, who came with an alabaster box of ointment into the house of one Simon a Pharisee, where Jesus sat at meat, and began to wash his feet with her tears, and to wipe them with the hairs of her head, and to anoint them with the ointment. Simon, perceiving this, wondered how our Lord could allow a woman which was a sinner, that is,

one who had formerly been of a notoriously bad character, to approach him. But instead of treating this poor weeping penitent with cruel disdain; instead of thrusting her away from his presence as unworthy of his regard, saying, *Stand by, for I am holier than thou*,—the compassionate Redeemer vindicates her cause, reproves the self-righteous Pharisee, relieves her anxious mind with the gracious assurances of pardon; and declares, that because much had been forgiven her, therefore she loved much.

Here let it be observed, how vastly they mistake the nature of the doctrine of grace, and misrepresent its genuine tendency, who consider it as injurious to the interests of morality. Did the gospel indeed give any encouragement to sinners continuing in sin, and determined to hold fast their transgressions; did it flatter them with the hopes of impunity in a course of iniquity; or lead them to expect the enjoyment of future happiness in the neglect of that holiness, without which, no man shall see the Lord—then the charge would be just, and to preach

the doctrine of free grace and justification by faith alone, would be not only dangerous to Society, but ruinous to the souls of men. But is not the very reverse of all this the truth? Is it not the professed design of the gospel *to call sinners to repentance?* Has not God the Father, *having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless us, by turning away every one of us from his iniquities?* And does not *the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, teach men, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world?* The gospel, it is true, gives encouragement to the greatest sinners:— But what *kind* of encouragement? Does it encourage to sin, because grace abounds; or afford the least ground to hope, that at any future period by confessing our sins, and imploring mercy in the name of Christ, we may obtain pardon? No. On the contrary, it strongly urges the danger of delay, and removes the chief ground of presumption, by assuring us, that repentance is not in our own power, but the gift of God. It reveals the pardoning love of God as an en-

couragement to instant, speedy, immediate repentance. The language of the gospel is, *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

Having thus endeavoured to illustrate the great pattern of Christian benevolence exhibited by Christ himself, *who came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*, I come now, as was proposed,

II. To point out the influence which this consideration ought to have in leading us to shew mercy to our fellow sinners.

But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice. In these words, our Lord refers to a passage in the prophecies of Hosea, (chap. vi. 6.) *For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice:* to

which allusion is made more than once in the New Testament. The meaning of the words, in connection with the passage before us, is plainly this, that mercy to the souls of men is far more acceptable and pleasing to God, than the strictest regard to mere outward observances, where the Spirit of true religion is wanting. In all ages men have been exceedingly prone to substitute the form, in place of the power of godliness, by a rigorous adherence to the mere external parts of worship, or even sometimes to their own vain traditions; while they have omitted *the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.* Such would do well to consider the *meaning* of this scripture, and, in general, *the end of the commandment; which is, charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.*

Upon this part of the subject a variety of considerations press upon our minds. But not to fatigue your attention, I shall only mention the two following:

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ, by coming into the world to call sinners to repentance, hath taught us the unspeakable value of the souls of men.—Surely those souls, to redeem which the Son of God became an inhabitant of our guilty world, and submitted to the most awful and excruciating sufferings, must be infinitely precious in the sight of God. If we estimate the value of any thing from the regard that is paid to it by wise and capable judges, what shall we think of the value of a single immortal soul, ransomed at such a price, and saved from everlasting destruction, by such a variety of astonishing means? Well might the great Preacher of righteousness say, *What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* Suppose a man possessed of the whole world, of all its honours, riches, and pleasures; yet what a poor compensation were these for the loss of an immortal soul! "The eternal salva-
"tion of one soul," says an excellent author, "is of greater importance than the temporal "salvation of a whole kingdom or empire for

" ten thousand ages, or indeed for any given " duration of time; because there will come " up a point in eternity, when that one soul " will have existed as many ages as all the " individuals of a kingdom, ranged in close " succession, will altogether have existed at " that given period. Therefore one soul is " capable of a larger share of happiness or " misery, to an endless duration, than all " the inhabitants of a whole kingdom are " capable of in ten thousand ages."—Shall we not then, Brethren, in the different stations in which providence hath placed us, account it our highest honour and privilege to be workers together with God, in promoting the salvation of immortal souls? especially when I add,

2. That our Lord Jesus Christ, by his example, as well as doctrine, hath taught us, that none of our fellow-sinners are beyond the reach of mercy.—The gracious Redeemer, as we have had occasion to observe, was not ashamed to be called *the Friend of publicans and sinners.* While he boldly reproved vice of every kind, and, in his own

character, *was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners*, he scrupled not to converse with persons of every description, with a view to their instruction and reformation, that he might reclaim sinners from the error of their way, and *turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.* In this, as in other respects, *he hath left us an example that we should follow his steps.* He hath taught us not to overlook or despise any of our fellow-sinners, however far they may have erred from the right path; but, while we hold their crimes in just abhorrence, and keep at a distance from their abominable practices, to shew pity to their souls, by employing all the means in our power to lead them to repentance, *that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.*

Upon these principles, and with these great and important objects in view, the PHILANTHROPIC SOCIETY of Edinburgh has been formed; at whose request I now address you. It took its rise from the pious

and successful endeavours of a few individuals, to recover, from their wretched course of life, some of the convicts in bridewell, who seemed not altogether indisposed to listen to instruction. The good effects attending these endeavours, suggested the idea of instituting a Society, for the purpose of instructing, and attempting to reclaim the criminal and profligate, wherever there might appear any reasonable prospect of effecting this salutary object; and this suggestion, dictated by true Christian benevolence, meeting with every possible countenance and encouragement from the Honourable Magistrates of this city, and others of the most respectable character, led to the adoption of those measures which have been already laid before the Public.

It is not my intention at present, to enter into a detail of the wretched circumstances of that miserable class of our fellow-creatures, for whose benefit this Society has been instituted. Alas! their condition is too well known to stand in need of any description; nor, supposing it needful, would such

a description be in all respects proper from this place. Suffer me only to observe, that the alarming progress of vice and profligacy in this city, has, of late years, greatly encreased the number of those unhappy creatures, who, sunk in sin, and lost to shame, infest our streets. To check, in some measure, this growing evil, it has been found necessary, within this short time, to erect a Bridewell, where criminals of different descriptions are adjudged to labour and confinement; the happy effects of which, in promoting the peace and good order of the community, are doubtless considerable. But still something was wanting to give this wise and salutary institution its full effect. Among the criminals brought into this situation, there are some not so hardened in vice as others, who have been so far influenced, by the discipline and instruction received during their confinement, as to express an earnest wish to leave off their vicious practices, were the least encouragement given, or any means provided, that might enable them to procure, after their liberation, proper protection, or a decent

livelihood. But to what hand can they look for such encouragement or protection? Abandoned by the reputable part of Society, unpitied by their cruel seducers, who have been the chief instruments of their ruin; the objects of general disgust and aversion, without a single friend or guardian, and surrounded only by their former companions in vice—what is to be expected, but that they will return to their former profligate courses, and become twofold more the children of hell than they were before?

A small degree of attention to these circumstances, must, I think, convince every feeling and unprejudiced mind, not only of the utility, but absolute necessity of such an institution as the PHILANTHROPIC SOCIETY, where an asylum is provided for such of those poor forlorn fellow-creatures as, *having forsaken the guide of their youth, and forgotten the covenant of their God*, are convinced of the evil of their ways, and sincerely desirous to return to the paths of religion and virtue. In the prosecution of this benevolent design, the Society, though

still in its infancy, have reason to hope their endeavours have already been blest with success. In the house which they lately procured for the greater convenience of superintending those under their charge, there are at present *seven*, and it is expected that a few more will soon be admitted. *Two*, under the protection of the Society, are now in service, and doing well: other applications for this purpose have been made; but the directors judge it expedient to refuse such applications till they have had an opportunity of making full proof of their sincerity, and can with confidence recommend them to families. It is almost unnecessary to say, that the strictest attention is paid by the Society, to the health, morals, and proper behaviour of those immediately under their care. Above all, it is their chief object to inform their minds, by instructing them in the great principles and duties of the Christian religion, from a full and deep persuasion that many of them *are destroyed for lack of knowledge*; and that it is the gospel of Jesus Christ alone, understood and felt in its genuine influence, that can

effectually cure the depravity of the human heart, or lay a foundation for good conduct in the various stations and relations of life.

It is enough, I hope, simply to have stated these facts. With the wise and discerning, they will plead more strongly than the most laboured address to the feelings. Let me only add, that, without the immediate and liberal aid of the Public, the benevolent designs of the Society must fall to the ground. Hitherto, on account of the scantiness of their funds, they have been obliged to act upon a very limited scale; but by the assistance of the friends of religion and humanity, with the blessing of God, they fondly flatter themselves, they will soon be enabled to extend their labours; and that, to meet with general countenance and approbation, the object of the PHILANTHROPIC SOCIETY only needs to be known.

Even in a political point of view, the object of this Society is of no small importance. If their exertions should produce no other effect, it must be allowed, at least,

that their tendency is highly conducive to the welfare of the community, and the temporal happiness of individuals. At all times, but especially in such times as the present, when increasing impiety and profligacy, threaten the dissolution of all established order, to lessen the number of public pests and nuisances, and to restore them as valuable members to society, is surely doing a most essential service to the state, and must meet with the countenance and support of every man who wishes well to his country.

But this, it is to be hoped, will not be *all* the fruit of their labours. There is a consideration of infinitely higher moment, which will be felt by those who are actuated by the spirit of true Christian benevolence. Jesus Christ, who *came into the world, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,* and *who went about doing good,* hath enjoined on his followers the exercise of mercy to the souls of men; and taught us, by his own example, the extent of this compassion. Here is the noblest field for exer-

tion; the most delightful service in which any of the friends of Jesus can be employed. Christians, do we stand so much in need of mercy from him whom we daily offend?—and shall we refuse to shew the like mercy to our fellow-sinners? Hath *God, for Christ's sake, forgiven us all our trespasses?*—and shall not the love of Christ constrain us to shew pity to our brethren who are perishing around us? *Who maketh us to differ from others? and what have we that we have not received? and if we have received it, why should we glory as if we had not received it?* Grace—free, sovereign, unmerited grace, is the cause, and the *only* cause of the difference betwixt one sinner and another. And if, *by the grace of God, we are what we are*, why should we despair of any of our fellow-sinners? Why should we limit the power and mercy of the Holy One of Israel, or cease to employ the most likely means for bringing the *stout hearted and rebellious, who are far from righteousness*, to the belief and obedience of the truth, that they may be as *brands plucked out of the fire?* Great are the

compassions of our heavenly Father; wonderful the patience and grace of our loving Redeemer! *Wherefore, my beloved Brethren, be ye followers of God, as dear children; be merciful, as your Father also is merciful; devise liberal things*, and *let the blessing of them that are ready to perish come upon you.*

And you, my respected Friends, who are more immediately engaged in this labour of love, continue your exertions with unremitting diligence and alacrity: cry mightily to God for the influences of his Spirit to accompany all your endeavours; nor be discouraged though you should meet with disappointment, and find reason to change your opinion of many of those, concerning whom you may have once entertained good hope. Such disappointments are by no means uncommon: Remember the work is the Lord's, and not *yours*; for *though Paul may plant, and Apollos water, it is God that giveth the increase.* If your exertions fail in some instances, they may succeed in others; and the salvation of one soul (if but one), how-

ever little it may be considered in the eyes of the world, will be found at last an abundant recompence for the labours of a lifetime; for *he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*

SERMON VII.

ON

JUSTIFICATION.

PHIL. iii. 9.

And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

THE Apostle Paul, the author of this epistle, was, in many respects, a remarkable instance of the power of converting grace. His views, his sentiments, his dispositions, were so entirely changed, that it might justly be said of him, after his conversion, that he became a new man. Before this period,

he was a Pharisee of distinguished eminence. He was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers. And not only did he enjoy every religious privilege peculiar to a Jew, but his conduct, so far as it came under the observation of his fellow-creatures, was blameless and unexceptionable. *If any other man*, says he, (ver. 4—6.) *thinketh he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more. Circumcised the eight day—of the stock of Israel—of the tribe of Benjamin—an Hebrew of the Hebrews—as touching the law, a Pharisee—concerning zeal, persecuting the church—touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*

Such was the character of Paul before his conversion; a character, some may think, which could not fail to be well-pleasing in the sight of God. But attend more narrowly to the account we have given of it, and you will perceive a most essential defect. With all his boasted privileges and attainments, he was labouring to *establish a righteousness*

of his own, not submitting to the righteousness of God. He was a stranger to the purity and spirituality of the divine law, and therefore unacquainted with the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of his own heart. *I was alive without the law once,* says he, *but when the commandment came,* when it was brought home to my conscience in all its power and spirituality, *sin,* which before lay undiscovered, *revived,* and as to all hope of acceptance with God, on account of my own personal righteousness, *I died.* Hence he adds in the context, that what things were counted gain to him, those he counted loss for Christ, (ver. 7.) The religious privileges which he had enjoyed were valuable in themselves, the obedience which he had performed to the law of God, so far as it went, might be sincere, and worthy of commendation from men, but when his mind was enlightened in the knowledge of the gospel, he was convinced of the utter insufficiency of either of these, to recommend him in the sight of God: and therefore, in this view, and in competition with Christ and his perfect righteousness,

he esteemed them, not only unprofitable, but injurious.

Nor was this all. Before his conversion, he had lived according to the strictest sect among the Jews, a Pharisee. In this state, his obedience to the law of God, however scrupulous, must have been very superficial, and in many respects defective. But after this period he became a distinguished proficient in all the branches of genuine holiness. He laboured more abundantly than the rest of the apostles, and for the sake of Christ and the gospel, chearfully underwent a variety of hardships and sufferings. But were these labours and sufferings, in any measure, the ground of his confidence in the sight of God? No. He renounces them as unworthy to share the honour with the perfect righteousness of Christ, in which alone he gloried as the foundation of all his hopes. *Yea, doubtless,* says he, (ver. 8, 9.) *and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but*

dung, that I may win Christ; and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God, by faith.

In discoursing on these words, I propose, through divine assistance,

I. To prove the insufficiency of our own righteousness to justify us in the sight of God.

II. To explain what is meant by the righteousness of faith, which the apostle opposes to his own personal obedience. And,

III. To point out the perfection and suitableness of this righteousness as the ground of a sinner's justification before God.

I. I am to prove the insufficiency of our own righteousness to justify us in the sight of God.

This is what most people who profess to take the scriptures for their guide will be readily disposed to grant. But from the manner in which the gospel is received, it is evident, that many who seem to assent to this proposition are far from understanding it; or, at least, are not suitably impressed with a sense of its truth and importance. For is it possible, that one who really believes the awful threatenings of God against the transgressors of his law, and who, at the same time, is persuaded that this is his own character, could listen to the offers of reconciliation held forth in the gospel, with such coldness and indifference? Think it not therefore unnecessary, that I endeavour to prove this great and fundamental truth, that *by the deeds of the law no flesh living shall be justified.*

Before, however, proceeding to a direct proof of this important point, it may be necessary to premise the two following observations:

1. That the law of God, which, as to the substance of it, was delivered from Mount Sinai in the ten commandments, was originally given to man, not only as the rule of his obedience, but likewise as the condition of life.

This is what is commonly called the covenant of works: and that there really subsisted such a covenant with man in his state of innocence, is plainly intimated in many passages of scripture. Thus the apostle Paul informs us, (Rom. vii. 10.) that *the commandment was ordained to life;* the meaning of which certainly is, that the law of God, here called *the commandment*, was originally designed to give life to man, which it could do only when a perfect obedience was given to its precepts. The same truth is taken for granted in the assertion of the apostle, Rom. viii. 3. *What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh:* Where, you will remark, that the insufficiency of the law to confer

life upon fallen man, is wholly imputed to the weakness of the flesh, that is, to the corruption of human nature, and our consequent incapacity of obeying that law. From which it plainly follows, that before this weakness was introduced by the fall, man might have secured the favour of God and eternal life, by his obedience to the law.

2. Notwithstanding the change that has taken place in the state of man, the law of God still continues the same, and its demands are as extensive now, as they were during his continuance in a state of innocence.

In proof of this, I have only to beg your attention to this single consideration, which few, it is presumed, will deny, that the law of God is a transcript of his moral image. This, therefore, being the case, if the perfections of God are unchangeable, his holy law, which is founded in these perfections, must be equally so. But to suppose, as some have done, that the demands of the divine law may be relaxed, and accommo-

dated to the weakness of human nature, is totally repugnant to this idea. It represents the Supreme Being as weak and inconstant. It arraigns his wisdom, in giving such a law to his creatures as could afterwards be set aside. Nay, is it not contrary to the proper notion of his goodness? for, if the law be holy, and just, and good, to require from his creatures any thing short of a perfect obedience, would be as incompatible with the happiness of the subject, as it is inconsistent with the honour of the Lawgiver.

Having made these observations, I shall now endeavour to prove the insufficiency of our own righteousness to justify us in the sight of God. This I shall do, not by any laboured train of argument, but by a simple and direct appeal to conscience; representing, on the one hand, the extensive demands of the divine law; and, on the other, the manifold defects that attend our best performances.

An obedience, then, commensurate with the demands of the divine law, or, in other words, a righteousness capable of justifying us in the sight of God, must be *spiritual*,—*universal*,—and *perpetual*. The first respects its nature, the second its extent, the last its duration.

1. The obedience which the law of God requires must be spiritual in its nature.

This is evident from the very nature of God, who is represented in scripture as the Searcher of hearts, and as requiring truth in the inward parts. In this respect he differs from man, who can judge of others only by the outward appearance. *Man looketh to the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.* The law, therefore, which God hath given to his creatures, can be satisfied with nothing less than a spiritual obedience. It demands, not only the outward expressions of veneration and gratitude, but likewise the inward unconstrained homage of the heart. It forbids the actual commission of murder, and,

at the same time, the slightest indulgence of malice or ill-will against our neighbour. It requires, not only chastity of life, but purity of heart. It reaches the secret disposition of covetousness, as well as the open violations of truth and justice. In a word, it is designed to regulate the principles and motives of our actions, as well as the actions themselves; and unless these principles and motives be such as the law of God approves, our obedience falls short of that perfection which is indispensibly necessary to our acceptance with God.

You are just in your dealings with others, that is,—you with-hold from no man what you esteem to be his due: but do you never take advantage of the ignorance or the necessities of your neighbours? Are you as tender of hurting his reputation as of injuring his property? In short, do you love your neighbour as yourselves, and study to do unto others in every respect, as you would wish that they, in like circumstances, should do unto you. Again, you are liberal to the poor, and ready, perhaps, to

presume upon this account that you must be in favour with God. But examine the motives of your conduct. Is it not often a love of praise, or, at best, an instinctive kind of benevolence, and not a sacred regard to the command of God, which moves you to bestow your charity? or, supposing that you are actuated upon the whole by nobler principles, yet is there not, at least, such a corrupt mixture of these baser motives, as justly contaminates your purest acts of beneficence in the sight of God?

2. The obedience which the law of God requires, must be universal. It must extend to every part of the law without exception. *Whosoever shall keep the whole law*, says the apostle James, *and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all**. The reason is obvious. The same authority that enjoined any one part, enjoined the whole; and, therefore, to make any exception in our obedience, is, in effect, to call in question the authority or the wisdom of the

* James ii. 10, 11.

Lawgiver. *For*, as the apostle adds, *He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.* On this account, it is not sufficient that we endeavour punctually to discharge the duties which we owe to our neighbour, if we withhold the love and obedience that are immediately due to God. Nor, on the other hand, will that obedience be acceptable in the sight of God, which is confined entirely to acts of piety and devotion, without an equal regard to the second table of the law.

Your time will not permit me to illustrate this part of the subject in all its branches, and therefore I shall confine myself to one single, but comprehensive branch of duty; which I do the rather, because, as it is of all duties the most important, so likewise it is the most generally neglected. You believe that there is a God. You acknowledge that this God is the most perfect and excellent of all beings, greater than human thought can comprehend, and more excellent than

can be either described or conceived. You are sensible, likewise, of your constant and absolute dependance upon Him, that all you enjoy is the fruit of his bounty, and that all you expect must be the effect of his goodness. Now, I ask, are your minds suitably impressed with a sense of the perfections of God? Do you feel sentiments of gratitude and affection towards him, corresponding to the number and value of the benefits you receive? And do you neglect no proper opportunity of expressing these sentiments, in the ways which he himself hath appointed? In a word, do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength? All this, you must own, is due to a being of such superlative excellence; and, to deny him the supreme affection of your souls, discovers at once the grossest insensibility, and the basest ingratitude. But if conscience can charge you with innumerable failures in these respects; if, instead of loving God, you discover an alienation of heart from him, even from that God who made and preserves you, and who daily loads you with his benefits; if you have frequent-

ly neglected to pay a sacred regard to his institutions, or, at least, have drawn near to him with your mouths, and honoured him with your lips, while your hearts were far from him—then, however strict you may have been in fulfilling the law of God in other respects, your obedience fails in one essential point, and, according to the principles before laid down, *he that offendeth in one point is guilty of all.*

3. The obedience which the law of God requires must be perpetual in its duration. To be sometimes pious and devout will be of no avail to your acceptance with God, unless your piety and devotion be constant as well as ardent. Nor is it enough that you conscientiously discharge the several duties of your station during one period of your life, unless you persevere in that course, from the beginning to the end of your days. Nay, if your obedience be intermitted but for the shortest time, the very idea of its perfection is destroyed, and by consequence, it can never be a proper ground of confidence toward God.

Ask yourselves, therefore, if your thoughts are at all times equally fixed and constant in the worship of God, and your affections equally warm and lively? Are you never surprised by any temptation, but always steady, watchful, and vigorous in your opposition to sin? and, in general, do the inward feelings of your soul uniformly keep pace with the outward performance of duty?

These, my Friends, are the demands of God's righteous law. These are the terms upon which you must expect to be justified, if you are seeking salvation by the works of the law. Nor think that in any case these demands can possibly be relaxed; for it is written, *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.* You must therefore either obey the law of God completely in all its parts, or else submit to the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel, and be willing to become absolute debtors to his grace. There is no middle way. There is no possibility of joining the two in your jus-

tification before God; for, as the apostle reasons upon a subject intimately connected with this, *If by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more of grace, otherwise work is no more work* *.

II. I shall now endeavour to explain what is meant by the righteousness of faith, which the apostle here opposes to his own personal obedience.

And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

Here let it be observed, that the righteousness which the apostle declares to be the ground of his confidence before God, is not faith itself. This is evident from his calling it the righteousness which is by the faith of Christ, and the righteousness of God by

* Rom. xi. 6.

faith *. Nor, indeed, supposing faith itself to be our justifying righteousness, could it with any propriety be opposed to our own personal obedience, since faith is as much an act of our own, as any act of obedience to the moral law. There is, however, too much reason to fear, that many who profess to believe the gospel, labour under this mistake; a mistake which arises from the want of just apprehensions of the proper distinction betwixt the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. They seem to think that the only difference consists in this, that the one required perfect obedience, such as we are now incapable of performing; but that the other promises salvation on easier terms, and accepts of faith and sincere obedience, instead of a perfect conformity to the law; and consequently, that if we do our best, we may hope to be saved at last, through the merits of Jesus Christ. But this opinion is

* It deserves to be noticed, that though we are often said in the New Testament to be justified by faith, (ἐκ πίστεως), and through faith, (διὰ πίστεως), yet we are never said to be justified (ὑπὸ) on account of it, as the meritorious procuring cause.

derogatory from the honour of the Redeemer, and totally repugnant to the whole scheme of the gospel. Strictly speaking, there is but one way of obtaining the favour of God and eternal life, and that is, by a perfect conformity to his holy law; for as we have before seen, this law is unchangeable in its nature and demands. Now the gospel reveals a righteousness perfectly adequate to these demands, and strictly conformable to the Justice of God; and the difference betwixt the covenant of works and the covenant of grace consists in this, that in the former, this perfect obedience must be performed in our own person, and by our own strength—in the latter, it is received as already wrought out for us, by a surety in our stead.

By the righteousness of faith, therefore, we understand the obedience and sufferings of Christ, which the gospel reveals as the grand object of our faith, and the sole ground of our confidence towards God. When man by his apostacy had become a transgressor of the divine law, he stood in

need of the gracious interposition of a Mediator, for the two following reasons:

1. As he had by disobedience incurred the penalty annexed to the transgression of the law, it became necessary, in order to his being re-instated in the favour of God, that some one, equal to the mighty undertaking, should undergo the punishment due to transgression.

2. As he had by the same means introduced weakness and corruption into his nature, it was likewise indispensably necessary that a surety in his room and stead should yield a perfect obedience to the precepts of the law.

In both these respects the divine Redeemer completely fulfilled the important office assigned to him, as Mediator between God and man. He endured the penalty we had incurred. *He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, that by his stripes we might be healed. He*

bare our sins in his own body on the tree. To redeem us from the curse of the law he was made a curse for us, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And, with regard to the other requisition of the law, he is said to have *fulfilled all righteousness*, and to have become *the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.* In short, the humiliation of Christ in all its parts, his taking upon him the human nature, his obeying in that nature the utmost demands of the law, his submitting to unexampled sufferings, and his continuing in that course of obedience till he could say with his dying breath, *It is finished;* all this must be viewed as constituting that righteousness by which a sinner is justified in the sight of God.

To point out the perfection and suitableness of this righteousness as the ground of a sinner's justification before God, was the

III. *Third* General Head proposed in the method.

The apostle in our text calls it the *righteousness of God.*

Now, it has a just claim to this honourable appellation for the following reasons:

1. Because it is a righteousness which God himself hath *appointed.* The wisdom of man could never have devised this method of obtaining the favour of God. It is a scheme, which, upon the very first proposal, declares its Author to be divine. Nay, so opposite is it to the natural prejudices of the human mind, that though, when fully understood, it must appear the brightest display of divine wisdom and grace, yet, by the careless and superficial observer, whose mind is not enlightened by the Spirit of God, it is esteemed foolishness. Hence this scheme of mercy is in scripture opposed to all methods of human contrivance. Thus, in Isa. xxviii. 15, 16. *Because ye have said, We have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: Therefore,* in opposition to all these methods of your own devising, *thus saith the Lord, behold, I lay*

in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation : he that believeth shall not make haste. This, therefore, is the appointment; the only appointment of God, for the salvation of sinners. It is an appointment, too, which God hath made from the beginning; for you are by no means to imagine, (as many seem to have done), that the gospel method of salvation is peculiar to the New Testament. No, my friends, the gospel was published as early as the fall of man, in the promise that *the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent.* It was the frequent subject of prophecy in succeeding ages. And the whole Levitical economy, which subsisted for so long a period, was chiefly designed to exhibit, under types and shadows, the nature and blessings of that salvation which was afterwards to be accomplished.

Abraham, the Father of the faithful, obtained salvation in this way; and the Old Testament Scriptures themselves bear witness concerning him, that *he believed God,*

and it was counted to him for righteousness. David, who lived under another dispensation, looked for the mercy of God in the very same way; for he describeth the *blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works*, saying, *Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.* In a later period of the church, Isaiah, who has not improperly been stiled the *Evangelical Prophet*, in name of all the faithful, exults in the same glorious truth: *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels* *. And again, *Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength, even to him shall men come, and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the Lord shall all the seed*

* Isa. lxi. 10.

of Israel be justified, and shall glory *. Jeremiah is equally explicit in declaring the same comfortable truth, *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is the name whereby he shall be called, the Lord* (or Jehovah), *our righteousness* †. To add but one instance more, Daniel, foretelling the time when Messiah should appear, makes use of the following remarkable language: *Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sin, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness* ‡.

Thus it appears, that in every period of the church, before the coming of our Savi-

* Isa. xlv. 24, 25. † Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.
‡ Dan. ix. 24.

our, the same truth was revealed as the object of faith; and that all who obtained the favour of God, obtained it in the same way, by believing the divine testimony concerning Christ, which was then more obscurely held forth under the veil of types and prophecies, but is now revealed to us who live under the gospel, in the fullest and clearest manner. But,

2. This righteousness is called the righteousness of God, because it was wrought out by him who was God as well as man.

Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. The righteousness, even of the most exalted creature, could be of no avail to the justification of a sinner in the sight of God. Obedience is due from every creature to his Creator, and

cannot, therefore, by its own intrinsic merit, procure blessings for others. But behold the depth of divine wisdom, as well as goodness! the Son of God himself becomes incarnate, obeys the divine law, suffers the threatened penalty, removes the curse, and obtains, for all who believe in his name, a title to the favour of God and eternal life. Hence we read in Scripture of being *purchased with the blood of God.* Astonishing expression! with the blood of Him who was God as well as man—*Immanuel, God with us.* As man only he suffered and died; but his human nature was so united to the godhead, as to constitute but one person, and from this union his atonement and righteousness derive infinite efficacy.

3. This righteousness may be called the righteousness of God, because God the Father hath accepted it.

Of this the resurrection of Christ from the dead is an undoubted evidence. When our blessed Lord suffered on the cross, he suffered in the room and stead of the guilty.

The Lord had laid on him the iniquity of us all, and therefore he exacted of him the punishment which our sins deserved. Our blessed Surety shed his precious blood for the remission of our sins, and was brought down to the dust of death, that he might purchase our redemption. But the grave could not possibly hold him. Soon he burst the bands of death, and triumphed gloriously over all opposition, leading captivity captive. His resurrection was the visible pledge and token of his victory. By it the Father declared his complete satisfaction in the finished work of Christ: He declared that he was well pleased with believing sinners for his righteousness sake; that the debt which they owed to divine justice was now completely discharged; that the honour of his law was vindicated, and the reign of grace established on the firm and immutable basis of impartial equity.

This glorious truth, therefore, is the grand foundation of the believer's faith and confidence before God. Accordingly, we find, that when the apostles after the day of Pen-

tecost, preached the doctrine of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, they principally insisted on this fact, in proof of what they advanced. *Be it known unto you all*, said the apostle Peter to the rulers of the Jews, *and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved* *. To the same purpose, the apostle Paul having established the truth of Christ's resurrection, thus addressed the rulers of the Synagogue, *Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And by him, all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses* †.

* Acts iv. 10—12. † Acts xiii. 38.

Upon the whole, then, must not that righteousness be perfect, and exactly suited to the wants of a sinner, which was appointed and accepted by God the Father, and wrought out by one who is his equal, the only begotten and well beloved Son of God? Must not that righteousness be perfect and suitable to our deplorable circumstances, which in every age has been the ground of the sinner's trust, to which thousands and tens of thousands are indebted for their eternal salvation, and the efficacy of which remains the same to the latest generations. *Where sin abounded, grace hath much more abounded. That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord* *.

APPLICATION.

1. Let me beseech all who now hear me, seriously to enquire, what is the ground of their confidence toward God?

* Rom. v. 20, 21.

I have endeavoured to shew you the insufficiency of our own righteousness, and the perfect suitableness and sufficiency of the method of salvation revealed in the gospel. Now let me ask you, Is the righteousness of Christ the only foundation on which you build your hopes for eternity? Be not hasty, my friends, to answer this question. It is not enough to say, that you trust in Christ for salvation; for many who say so, discover too plainly by their conduct that they have never known the grace of God in truth. If you are built upon the foundation which God hath laid in Zion, then you must have discovered previously your lost and ruined circumstances as sinners in the sight of God. You must have seen yourselves condemned by the sentence of his righteous law, and not only seen, but felt the justice of that sentence. If you are built on this foundation, then you must have perceived a peculiar excellence and glory in the gospel—an excellence and glory infinitely superior to every thing which the world calls good or great. You must have been brought with the apostle to *count all things but loss*

for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. Unto them which believe He is precious. His name is as ointment poured forth; and an interest in him, and in the favour of God through him, appears of infinitely greater value than ten thousand worlds. Are these things so with you? or are you still ignorant of the peculiar glory of the gospel, and of your own pressing need of it? Then let me beseech you, as you value your own souls, not to remain in this dreadfully dangerous situation, no, not for a single moment. Perhaps you never before questioned the safety of your state. If so, then it is high time to awake out of sleep, and seriously to put to your own conscience this most important of all questions, Am I in Christ, or not? Were I this moment to be called into the presence of God, to answer at his tribunal, what could I plead before him? Would I plead the righteousness of Christ? Let me ask myself, what do I know about this righteousness? Did I ever properly consider what it means? Was I ever convinced of my need of it, and brought to renounce all my former self-righteous

refuges, and to depend on this alone as the ground of my confidence in the mercy of God?

It is to be feared, that there are many living in a state of awful security, from a presumptuous confidence in their own righteousness. If at any time their conscience is awakened under the afflicting hand of God, or under the ministry of his word, how soon are their fears dispelled, by reflecting on what they reckon a well spent life, good dispositions, or virtuous actions? But such refuges as these will prove miserable comforters, when death, the king of terrors, begins his approach; and still more at that grand and decisive period, when the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. Then shall it be found, to the everlasting confusion of all despisers of the gospel, that *other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

2. Such as are awakened to perceive their dangerous and lost situation as sinners, may derive encouragement from this subject, and

be directed what course to pursue. Beware of striving, my friends, to obtain the favour of God and eternal life, by your own doings. You must first receive spiritual life from Christ, before you can be capable of performing any spiritual or acceptable obedience. Go, search the scriptures, for in them are the words of eternal life, and they are they which testify of Christ. Examine with attention, and with a mind free from prejudice, the way of salvation as it is laid down in the gospel. Place yourselves as in the presence of God. Compare your actions with the perfect standard of the divine law. Look into the secret springs of your conduct; and let your heart be affected with a deep sense of your guilt and misery. Attend to the gospel plan of salvation in its connection and fulness. Ponder the precious truths of the word of God. Pray over them. Endeavour to apply them. You will find that there are properly no qualifications required to prepare you for the grace of the gospel, unless guilt and misery can be accounted such. Go, therefore, cast yourselves at the feet of sovereign mercy.

Confess your unworthiness. Pray that God would effectually open your eyes to see his glory as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ, and that he would fulfil in you the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power. Believe, and plead the promise of his grace, and take encouragement from such assurances as these: *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and him that cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out.*

Finally, Let true believers, who are looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, be careful to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works; for these things are good and profitable unto men.* In this way only can we justify the sincerity of our faith, and the truth of our Christian profession; and thus may we hope to advance the glory of our Redeemer, and *to*

put to silence the mouths of gainsayers, while we shew out of a good conversation our works with meekness of wisdom.

SERMON VIII.

THE LAW ESTABLISHED BY THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH.

ROMANS iii. 31.

Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

IN matters of religion, as in other things, men are generally prone to extremes. Hence has arisen the unhappy opposition which has too often been stated betwixt faith and practice. Some have altogether neglected and undervalued sound principles, and confined the whole of religion to what they esteem a regular practice; while others, equally mistaken, have laid the whole stress on orthodox opinions, to the disparagement

and neglect of moral duties. The gospel gives no countenance to either of these extremes. It unites, what, alas! men have too often attempted to separate, a sound belief with a holy and virtuous life. On the one hand, it teaches, that good principles are the only foundation of good practice; that a corrupt tree can produce nothing but corrupt fruit; and, that whoever would attain habitual conformity to the will of God, must first believe in the name of Christ, and feel the influence of evangelical truth. On the other hand, it teaches, that the belief which men profess to have in the gospel, is nothing but a dead faith, a mere unprofitable notion, if it does not produce the fruits of universal holiness, in the temper and conversation; and, that all hopes of heaven, which are not supported by this clear and indispensable evidence, are vain and delusive.

Thus the word of God uniformly instructs us. While it gives no countenance to the self-righteous Pharisee, who seeks to recommend himself to his Maker by his own do-

ings, it equally condemns the slothful and unprofitable servant, who, under pretence of honouring the gospel, omits, or carelessly performs the weighty matters of the law. It speaks peace to the guilty sinner, who, despairing of salvation by the works of the law, flees for refuge to the hope set before us in the gospel. But this peace is connected with holiness. It is not designed as a pillow on which a man may lie down in ease and security; but as a spur to diligence, a motive to activity, a powerful incitement to the practice of all that is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report.

The words which I have just now read as the ground of this discourse, clearly express the apostle's sentiments on this important subject. If we look back to the preceding context, we find him engaged in proving, that we are justified by faith alone. With this view, he considers the state both of Jews and Gentiles, and shews, with abundance of evidence, from fact, as well as scripture testimony, that *all have sinned, and*

come short of the glory of God. Having inferred from thence the impossibility of being justified by our own obedience, and stated the method which the gospel reveals, he concludes with this declaration, that *a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law.*

It was easy to foresee an objection against this doctrine, which might be made, and which actually has been made in all ages; that to say we are justified by faith alone, without the deeds of the law, is, in fact, to abolish the law. The apostle, without entering into a formal refutation, denies the charge, and asserts, in the strongest language, that the tendency of his doctrine was directly the reverse. *Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.*

I think it altogether unnecessary to take up your time in shewing that by *the law* here, the apostle can mean no other than the moral law. This is the only law that is

established through faith. For the ceremonial law, which was given to the Jewish church for a particular purpose, till the fulness of time should come, was certainly made void, and altogether set aside by the gospel. But the moral law, which was given to be the rule of man's obedience from the beginning, so far from being made void by the gospel of Jesus Christ, is confirmed and enforced by new obligations.

This is the truth which I propose at this time to illustrate, in a humble dependance on divine aid. With this view, I shall,

I. Lay before you, very shortly, the doctrine of faith, as taught by the apostle here, and in other parts of his writings.

II. Explain what is meant by *making void the law*. And,

III. Prove that the law is not made void, but established through faith.

I. I am to lay before you the doctrine of

faith, as taught by the Apostle here, and in other parts of his writings.

Upon this part of the subject, I shall only attempt a summary of what you are accustomed to hear more fully explained in the course of our ordinary ministrations. The doctrine of faith is the doctrine of salvation through the blood and righteousness of the Son of God. It is the doctrine which teaches, that we are *justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.* This can only be understood by those who entertain just conceptions of the present state of human nature. According to the account which scripture gives of the fallen corrupted state of man, an account which is uniformly confirmed by fact and experience, *every mouth is stopped, and the whole world is become guilty before God.* All men, however different in their characters and circumstances, are, in this respect, considered on an equal footing in the sight of God. They have *all sinned and come short of the glory of God.* They are all equally exposed to divine condemna-

tion, and equally incapable of relieving themselves by any exertions of their own. In this situation the gospel brings a suitable and seasonable relief. It informs us, that a person of no less dignity than the Son of God, undertook from eternity to restore an innumerable multitude of the guilty apostate race of Adam, to the favour and image of their Maker; and that, in pursuance of this purpose, a variety of means have been employed, suited to the grandeur and importance of the undertaking. In particular, we learn, that immediately upon the fall of man an intimation was given to our first parents of God's gracious design of saving sinners. It was promised, that *the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent.* The mercy contained in this promise was gradually unfolded in subsequent revelations, till, at length, in the fulness of time, *God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.*

When this divine person appeared in our world, it was, as had been foretold in an-

cient prophecy, not with the pomp and splendour of a king, but in the humble *form of a servant*. He became *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*. His whole life was a series of the most disinterested beneficence. But for his love he received hatred. He *endured the contradiction of sinners against himself*; was reviled, insulted, betrayed; and, at last, *by wicked hands crucified and slain*.

These are marvellous facts. The gospel explains their cause. It informs us, that in the whole of this amazing transaction, our Lord Jesus Christ acted as a public person. *He was made sin for us, who knew no sin*, that is, though perfectly free from sin, he was considered in the eye of the divine law as a transgressor. Our guilt was imputed to him; therefore *it pleased the Lord to bruise him and put him to grief. He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. He bare our sins in his own body on the tree*, and chearfully submitted to all the appointments of

of his heavenly Father, till the work was finished that had been given him to do.

Thus far the Redeemer appears in a humble and suffering state, obeying, as our surety, the precepts, and enduring the penalty of the divine law. But from this period, a more pleasing scene opens to our view. Jesus, the Prince of life, after submitting for a season to the power of death, rises triumphant from the grave. The bands of death are burst asunder. The shout of victory is heard. It is the shout of a king. The glorious Redeemer triumphs over principalities and powers. The ransom is paid; complete atonement is made for sin; everlasting righteousness is brought in; and, if you ask what evidence can be produced of all this? It is answered, evidence the simplest and the most satisfying. *The Lord is risen indeed, and God the Father hath given him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God.*

Such, my Christian friends, is the doctrine of faith which the apostles preached,

and which has been found in every age to be *the power of God, and the wisdom of God unto salvation. God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses.* Justice is now satisfied; the law fulfilled; and every obstacle removed, that stood in the way of a sinner's recovery to God and happiness. For Him hath *God set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness in the remission of sins.* To believe this great, this comfortable truth, and simply to rely for pardon, peace, and eternal life, on the faithful word of that God who cannot lie, is what the scripture calls *the obedience of faith*—the first and great duty of a sinner, in obeying which, according to the divine appointment, he is furnished with strength to obey all the other commandments of God.

If this account of the doctrine of faith be agreeable to the word of God, then you will easily perceive, that in the justification of a sinner in the sight of God, our own works can have no place. In the grand scheme of

salvation, they certainly have a place, and what that place is, I shall afterwards endeavour to shew: But, at present I would observe, and I wish it to be deeply impressed upon your minds, that no good disposition or qualification whatever, nothing, in short, that distinguishes one man from another, can be joined with the righteousness of Christ as the ground of our confidence towards God. Here there is no room for boasting. We must be saved either completely by grace, or completely by our own works. *To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*

Having thus laid before you what I apprehend to be the doctrine of faith, I proceed,

II. To explain what is meant by *making void the law.*

The original word signifies to render useless, or of no avail. It expresses the same idea

that is stated by our blessed Lord, when he says, *I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it*. Now, there are two ways in which the law may be said to be destroyed, or made void;

1. In principle; when any doctrine is taught, which, in its just consequences, has a tendency to relax our obligations to obey the law of God.

2. In practice; when persons take encouragement from mistaken views of gospel truths, to continue in sin, or to be less punctual in discharging the duties which they owe to God or their fellow-creatures.

1. The law of God is made void in principle, when any doctrine is taught, which, in its just consequences, has a tendency to relax our obligations to duty. Thus to suppose, that holiness is less necessary now, than it was before the coming of Christ; or that a less degree of it is necessary; or that it is less necessary to believers than to others; or even to suppose that we may safe-

ly take more liberty in particular cases, than we could have done before we believed; all this is, in effect, to make void the law, since it weakens the obligations to duty, and encourages the natural sloth and indolence of the human mind. We cannot magnify too much the grace of God in the salvation of men; but let us beware of doing it in such a manner, as would, by just consequence, furnish the slothful and unprofitable servant with an excuse for his wickedness. Let us not hold opinions derogatory from the honour of the law of God, which we certainly do, if we imagine that good works are in no respect necessary to salvation. Though they are neither a condition, nor a qualification for our acceptance with God, they are necessary as an evidence of our faith in the gospel, and a preparation for the enjoyment of future happiness. Hence we are said to be *created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them;* and the apostle expressly declares, that *without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.*

Whatever therefore has a tendency to relax the obligations to duty, must on that account be wrong, and contrary to the form of sound words delivered in the scriptures. How unjustly these consequences have been attributed to the doctrine of faith, as I have endeavoured to explain it under the former head of discourse, it remains afterwards to shew. At present, I go on to observe,

2. That the law is made void in practice, when, from mistaken views of gospel truths, persons take encouragement to continue in sin, or to be less punctual in discharging the duties which they owe to God, or to their fellow-creatures. This is a much more common way of making void the law than the former. There is much practical Antinomianism in the world. The heart of man is prone to sin, and every thing is laid hold of, that can furnish a plausible pretext for a conduct which conscience does not fail to condemn. For this purpose the most precious doctrines are abused, and even the grace of God itself is turned into licentiousness. Thus, the doctrine of salvation with-

out the works of the law, is frequently laid hold of by men of corrupt minds, to whom the commandments of God are grievous. The notion of the saints' final perseverance affords an easy pillow for those to rest on, who, though destitute of spiritual life, labour to persuade themselves that they are Christians, because they once had some serious thoughts, and made some profession of religion. In like manner; in what the scriptures teach concerning the total inability of fallen man, there are many who think that they find a sufficient plea to justify their negligence and sloth. Few indeed are so bold as to maintain in words; that Christ hath purchased for his people a release from obedience, in other words, a liberty of sinning; but, alas! how many are there, who indulge themselves in evil tempers, and evil habits, from a presumptuous confidence of being saved at last through the merits of Christ; not considering, that *the grace of God which bringeth salvation, teacheth us to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world.*

Thus you see in what way the law of God is made void, both in principle and in practice. What countenance such principles, or such practice have from the doctrine of faith, when rightly understood and cordially believed, will appear from the

Third general head of discourse; in which I am to prove, that the law of God is not made void, but established through faith.

When we affirm that the law is established through faith, the meaning is, that the gospel lays the surest foundation for obedience, and that the belief of the doctrines of grace, proves the most powerful inducement to the practice of universal holiness. The truth of this assertion will appear, I hope, from the following considerations:

1. The sacred authority and perpetual obligation of the law of God are vindicated in the strongest manner, by the doctrine of faith.

This doctrine teaches us, that when man had become a transgressor of the divine law, all hope of obtaining the favour of God and eternal life, by any method of his own devising, was taken away. The awful, but righteous sentence of the law is, *The soul that sinneth, it shall die.* It admits of no abatement or composition, but insists on full payment, to the utmost extent of its demands. Perfect in its nature, it cannot possibly accommodate itself to the weakness and corruption of man; but requires an obedience suitable to its nature, spiritual, universal, and perpetual. In these circumstances, the Son of God interposed to save us. *Lo! I come,* was his gracious language, *in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart.* But for what purpose did he come? Not surely, as some have imagined, to put us into a capacity of becoming our own saviours. Not to prescribe terms or conditions, on complying with which, we might acquire a title to the blessings of his salvation. This is an idea, not only unworthy of the great Redeem-

er, but derogatory likewise from the honour of the divine law. It was for a nobler purpose that the Son of God was manifested in the flesh. He came to make complete reconciliation for iniquity, by bringing in an everlasting righteousness. Nothing short of a perfect righteousness can satisfy the law of God; and such a righteousness the Son of God hath accomplished, by his obedience unto death; a righteousness every way commensurate to the extensive demands of the law, in which the piercing eye of divine justice itself can discover no imperfection; and, on account of which, without any other consideration, *God is just, in justifying the ungodly who believe in Jesus.*

Such is the doctrine of faith; and say, my friends, can any thing give a nobler or more honourable representation of the law of God? Does its perpetual obligation, or its sacred authority ever appear in so striking and venerable a light, as when viewed in connection with the righteousness of God our Saviour? This truly is a spectacle worthy the attention of all the subjects of God's moral go-

vernment, being the highest possible proof of his unalterable regard to that rule which he hath prescribed for the conduct of his intelligent creatures.

What superficial views of the gospel, then, must they entertain, who can once suppose that the obedience of Christ, in the room and stead of sinners, was ever meant to grant them a release from personal obedience. How strange a conclusion! How absurd to think, that the great God would have employed such a wonderful method to assert the dignity and authority of his law, only that his creatures might have the liberty of transgressing it! It is impossible that such impious thoughts can seriously enter into the mind of that man who properly understands, and firmly believes the gospel of Christ. The more confidently he relies on the righteousness of God his Saviour, the more deeply must his mind be impressed with a sense of the authority and obligation of the law. It was a conviction of the purity of this law, that first taught him the necessity of a better righteousness than his own, and still, by the same

means, he is kept *looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus unto eternal life.* He expects no favour from God on account of any merit of his own, not because obedience is less pleasing to him than to others, but because the commandments of his God appear to him exceeding broad. He rejoices in the finished work of the divine Redeemer, not because it weakens the obligations to duty, but because, in this glorious scheme of mercy, he perceives the character of God, and the authority of his law most fully vindicated. He can truly say with the apostle, *I delight in the law of God after the inward man;* and with the Psalmist, *O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth. Through thy precepts I get understanding, therefore I hate every false way.*

2. As the sacred authority and perpetual obligation of the law of God are vindicated, in the strongest manner, by the doctrine of faith, so there are new obligations superadded by the gospel, to enforce obedience.

To illustrate all these particularly, would require more time than the limits of a single discourse will allow. I shall only mention a few of the most remarkable.

First, then, a conviction of its infinite evil, must surely be allowed to be a powerful motive to depart from sin. But by what means can this conviction be produced to such a degree, as by a firm belief of the doctrine of faith relating to the sufferings and death of Christ? Never did the world behold such a display of the evil of sin as in the sufferings and death of the Son of God. The dignity of his person, and the greatness of his sufferings, are two circumstances which mark in stronger colours than words can express, God's infinite abhorrence of sin, and his determined invariable purpose to punish it. *If these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?* If such were the sufferings of the Son of God, when bearing only the punishment of imputed guilt, how dreadful the condition of the ungodly sinner, when brought into judgment for his personal

transgressions! Can any one imagine, that the great God should hate sin so much, and find it necessary to punish it so severely, in the person of the Surety, and yet connive at the sins of those for whom the Surety suffered? The very nature of God forbids such a thought. Nor will the true believer ever indulge it. On the contrary, every view which he takes of the method of salvation, every act of trust and confidence in the grace of his Redeemer, will increase his hatred to sin, and excite him to fly from it.

Again, Just apprehensions of the holiness of God, have always been found to produce correspondent effects on the characters of the persons who entertain them. Now, the doctrine of faith gives us the brightest display of this glorious attribute of the divine nature. It teaches us, that before man could be admitted to friendly intercourse with his Maker, a sacrifice of no less value than the death of God's dear Son, was indispensably necessary. A mere nominal professor of the faith of Christ may be little affected with this truth. He may still en-

tertain low and unworthy apprehensions of the majesty and holiness of God. But it will, it must be otherwise with the true believer, who has seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. He beholds in the glass of the Redeemer's sufferings, such a display of the divine holiness as powerfully transforms him into the same image. Taught by this discovery, he is more and more convinced of the impossibility of enjoying the favour of God, while sin retains its dominion in his soul. He looks for acceptance indeed on account of the righteousness of another, but the very means which procure this acceptance, point out to him, at the same time, the indispensable necessity of real personal holiness, to qualify him for the presence and enjoyment of God. 'Who can stand before this holy 'Lord God,' will the true believer say, 'after the astonishing proof which he hath 'given of his unalterable regard to holi-'ness, in not sparing his own Son? How 'can I expect to be admitted into his hea-'venly presence, without first receiving the 'grace of his Holy Spirit, to sanctify this

'polluted soul of mine? As soon may light 'and darkness dwell together, as God de- 'light in the soul that is not, in some mea- 'sure, made partaker of his holiness.'

But the motives which are chiefly insisted upon in the New Testament, and which the gospel in a peculiar manner inspires, are love and gratitude. These two powerful principles in our nature, are allowed to have great influence in the common affairs of life; and, certainly, they cannot have less when excited by that grace which brings salvation to the soul. Now, where can we find such objects to awaken our love and gratitude, as in the gospel of Jesus Christ? Here we behold the most amazing instance of love which it is possible to conceive; an instance of it so wonderful, that the sacred writers themselves labour for expressions to describe its greatness. Conceive to yourselves a person delivered from some imminent danger by the seasonable interposition of a generous benefactor; a danger too which he clearly foresaw, but from which it was utterly impossible for him to be delivered

by any other means. This will but faintly represent the circumstances of a convinced awakened sinner, who has obtained comforting discoveries of the salvation of Christ. Once he thought himself beyond the possibility of a recovery. He stood, as it were, on the very brink of destruction. He saw the bottomless pit ready to receive him, and his heart meditated nothing but terror. In these circumstances the joyful tidings of the gospel were brought to his mind. He beheld the Almighty Father seated on a throne of grace, and heard him, as he nenever did before, issuing out from the excellent glory this gracious command, *Deliver from going down into the pit, for I have found a ransom.*

What then must be the sentiments of his heart on obtaining such a seasonable deliverance? Will he sin because so much grace hath abounded? Rather, will not his heart burn within him, with godly sorrow for his past transgressions, and with the most sincere and hearty resolutions of future obedience. Such, it is evident, is the natural effect of

gratitude; and such, we find, was its influence on the apostles and first believers of the gospel. It was this principle that inspired them with that undaunted resolution and fortitude, which they displayed in their peculiarly trying circumstances. This made pain easy, and labour pleasant. This gave fervour to their zeal, strength to their resolution, vigour and constancy to every part of their conduct. For the love of Christ constrained them. And why is the obedience of so many professing Christians in the present day so unlike that of the apostles and first believers; so superficial, so unequal, so inconstant? Why, but because the doctrine of free grace is so little understood, so little believed, so little felt in its genuine influence. 'Let the love of Jesus 'but reign in my heart; let it be ever pre-'sent to my mind; let my thoughts dwell 'upon it, till my soul is warmed with its ge-'nuine influence. This will serve instead of 'ten thousand arguments to persuade me to 'obedience. It will make my soul swift like 'the chariots of Aminadib. It will animate 'me to the discharge of every duty; render

'me patient under suffering, temperate in 'prosperity, and chearful in adversity. This 'will raise me above the smiles and frowns 'of the world; reconcile me to every change 'of condition; and make the prospect of dis-'solution itself pleasant and delightful.'

3. The law is established through faith, because obedience is one of the principal ends for which we are called to believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Faith and obedience stand related to each other as cause and effect. The latter is produced by the former. We do not become intitled to the blessings of salvation, on account of any holiness of which we are capable; but, on the contrary, every measure or degree of holiness is the effect of believing the gospel. It is a part, and an essential part of the salvation itself, which Christ hath wrought out for his people. And, accordingly, we are said to *purify our souls by obeying the truth*, and to be *chosen unto salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.* In

this order, the connection betwixt faith and holiness is uniformly represented in the sacred writings. Good works are one end of our election. *God hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame, before him in love.* They are one end and design of our redemption by Jesus Christ, who *gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.* They are the end of our calling, for *God hath called us unto holiness.* They are the indispensable evidence, as well as the certain fruits of a living faith. *Faith without works is dead, and by works is faith made perfect. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works: for these things are good and profitable unto men.* Finally, good works, as was before observed, are necessary to prepare us for the enjoyment of heaven; for *without holiness no man shall see the Lord.*

Thus the law is established through faith. The doctrine of faith is the foundation of obedience. The belief of the truth is the animating principle of holiness. Nor is it a matter of indifference whether or not this order be preserved, provided the connection betwixt faith and holiness be in any sense admitted. The order is clearly established by infinite wisdom. Reverse or confound it, and immediately you convert the gospel into a self-righteous scheme. You may continue after this to use the words *grace*, *faith*, and *gospel*, but you employ them in another sense than that in which the apostles understood them; and, in proportion to the degree in which this order is perverted, your minds are corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

In the last place, The law is established through faith, because the doctrine of faith furnishes the believer with the most powerful encouragements, in his endeavours to attain holiness.

There are two considerations, which serve as mighty encouragements to the practice

of our duty. The one is the promise of assistance, and the other the hope of acceptance with God. For want of these, many who seem to begin well, soon decline from the path of duty, and turn back to the world. Some labour a while in their own strength, to attain conformity to the will of God; but, on the appearance of difficulties, they give over the vain attempt, and their strength and their hopes perish together. Others, after going about to establish a righteousness of their own, not submitting to the righteousness of God, on perceiving the imperfection attending their best services, despair of success; suffer themselves to be *again entangled in the pollutions of the world, and overcome; and the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.*

Now, the doctrine of faith, or, which is the same thing, the doctrine of grace, is admirably fitted to preserve the soul, from sinking into that state of despondency which unfits for every vigorous exertion. It animates the Christian with the promise of all necessary assistance in the performance of

his duty. *Fear not, for I am with thee,* is the gracious language of God to every one of his people; *be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.* With what chearfulness and alacrity may the believer work out his own salvation, when he knows that it is God which worketh in him both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Again—The hope of acceptance is another circumstance which serves as a migh-

ty encouragement to the performance of our duty. This hope, as you have heard, rests entirely on the merits of the Saviour, and therefore, is not fluctuating and uncertain, like the hope which is built on any other foundation. Hence, the obedience which flows from it, is not the constrained submission of a slave, but the liberal and ingenuous service of a child, who is bound by the cords of love. At the same time, this hope of final acceptance is perfectly compatible with a reverential fear of God, and a godly jealousy over ourselves. The faith of the gospel, while it inspires a joyful hope, has a tendency likewise to beget a humble, tender, and watchful spirit. If the confirmed and established believer has more holy boldness, he has also less self-confidence. If he is surer than others of deliverance from hell, he is likewise more sensible that he deserved it. If he is less apt to be shaken in faith, he is more apt to be affected by the solemn warnings of scripture, by the frowns of his God, and by the calamities of his fellow-creatures. In a word, he becomes *stedfast*

and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as he knows, that his labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

Thus have I finished all that I proposed on the doctrinal part of this subject, and it now only remains, that I conclude with a few words of application.

1. From what has been said, you may judge, whether you are possessed of true faith in the gospel. Has it *come to you, not in word only, but in power also, and in the Holy Ghost?* You may possibly have assented to all that has been said on the connection betwixt the law and the gospel, or faith and holiness. Your judgment may be convinced, that matters have really been as they have been represented. But if you rest here, if these truths remain in your minds as mere subjects of speculation, what will it avail you? *Better not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after you have known it, to turn from the holy commandment.* Indeed, the genuine principles of

Christianity have this advantage above all other systems of morality, that where they are properly understood and believed, they have a necessary influence on the practice. By some who profess them they may be abused; by those who really believe them they never can. But there is a traditionary belief of the gospel, which may always be expected to prevail in those places where the gospel is preached; and though this can produce nothing but a customary profession, it is too often mistaken for that living faith, which changes the heart, and regulates the life. Beware, my friends, of this fatal mistake. Do not take it for granted that you believe the gospel, if you have no better reason than this, that you never called in question the truth of any of its doctrines. Perhaps you never seriously applied your minds to this subject. Perhaps you never felt yourselves to be in the circumstances in which the gospel considers us. Or, perhaps, you have hastily taken up a wrong notion of the gospel, and may think that you believe the doctrine of the prophets and apostles, while you are only be-

lieving a delusion of your own imagination. If you are living without God in the world, if the love of sin prevail in your souls, if you are proud or revengeful, deceitful or dishonest, unchaste or intemperate; if piety towards God and love to men be not the leading features in your character; if your friends, your families, your neighbours—if the world at large cannot bear witness, at least to the general consistency of your conduct, you never have believed the gospel, you never have received the grace of God in truth; for by the doctrine of faith, as the apostles understood and taught it, the law is not made void, but confirmed and established.

2. From this subject, let me exhort true believers to justify the sincerity of their profession, by the holiness of their lives. We may reason, my Friends, upon the good tendency of our principles. We may shew, to the conviction of every unprejudised mind, that the doctrines of grace are doctrines according to godliness. But all this will have little influence, unless our argu-

ments be supported by more solid and substantial proofs. The enemies of the gospel will judge of its tendency more from the actions, than from the words of its professors. And though this be a false rule of judging, and though a degree of perfection be often expected from a religious character, greater than is attainable in the present state, yet it were much to be wished, that believers in general were more careful than they are, to remove every ground of offence, and to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Consider, my Brethren, the eyes of many are upon you. The glory of God, the honour of the Redeemer, and the salvation of precious souls are intimately connected with the part that you act. *Be blameless*, therefore, *and harmless, the children of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. Abstain from all appearance of evil.* Nor think that a merely negative

good character is a sufficient justification of the truth of your faith. Aim at something higher. Study to be useful, as well as innocent; and *let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

SERMON IX.

FAITH'S VICTORY OVER THE WORLD.

1 JOHN v. 4.

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

THE Christian life is with great propriety represented as a state of warfare. We are placed in this world as on a field of battle, where dangers stand thick on every side, and where thousands are continually falling around us. Our enemies are numerous and powerful. *We wrestle not against flesh and blood only, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickednesses in high places.* The

world, too, is a dangerous foe to the Christian. All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is hostile to the growth of grace in the soul. And when you add to this, the powerful corruptions of our own deceitful and desperately wicked hearts, which give strength to every temptation, and second all the attacks of our spiritual adversaries, you will then have some idea of the difficulties and dangers of the Christian warfare.

In these circumstances, how shall creatures, so weak and defenceless as we are, maintain the combat with such formidable foes? By what means shall we resist their united attacks, and rise superior to all their machinations? The Scriptures inform us, that faith is the weapon with which alone we can successfully fight the battles of the Lord. By *the shield of faith*, we are enabled *to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. Through faith we endure, as seeing Him who is invisible. And this is*

the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

The words of the text contain a plain and important proposition, which I shall endeavour to illustrate and improve, by shewing,

I. What it is in the world that the Christian has to overcome: And,

II. How his faith enables him to obtain the victory.

I. I begin with shewing, what it is in the world that the Christian has to overcome.

This term, *the world*, is used in different significations in scripture. Sometimes it is applied to the things, and at other times to the men of the world. *Love not the world*, says the apostle John, *neither the things of the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* When applied to the men of the world, it generally signifies, the ungodly

and unbelieving, as distinguished from those who receive the testimony of God, and are walking according to the rules of his word. These latter are uniformly represented as a people chosen out of the world, and actuated by other views and principles. *We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.*

Now, the Christian's passage to heaven lies through this dangerous and defiling world. He has a part to act in it. He must necessarily mingle in its cares and business, share in its vexations and troubles, and occasionally associate with worldly men. Much watchfulness, therefore, is necessary to preserve his heart pure, and his garments clean, amidst so many defilements; and, notwithstanding all the entanglements that he meets with, to be continually pressing forward in the way to heaven. The world, by various methods, is perpetually attempting to draw him back into the ways of sin. Its temptations are chiefly of two kinds, its *allurements*, and its *terrors*.

1. The Christian has to overcome the allurements of the world.

These are its most dangerous temptations, and too often they are the least suspected. Many who have boldly withstood the shock of persecution, have fallen a prey to the soft alluring pleasures of sin. The world holds out many fair enticing charms. It addresses the senses and imagination; and, in ten thousand ways, insinuates itself into our heart. It first deceives, and then leads captive the unwary soul. It first infatuates, and then destroys. Sometimes it allures the sinner into the fascinating paths of sensual indulgence; sometimes it presents to him the flattering prospects of ambition; and at other times it draws its votary into the pursuit of sordid gain. Its temptations are artfully varied, according to the different age, temper, and condition of those to whom they are presented. And ah! my brethren, how fatally successful is this deluding enchantress! How many, without the least opposition, or, at best, after a very feeble resistance, have yielded to her seduc-

tions, and have been carried down the stream of carnal delights or worldly pursuits! Thus, many a fair appearance of religion has been blasted; and many, who once seemed to set their faces towards Zion, have turned back, and walked no more with Christ. *Demas hath forsaken me*, saith the apostle, *having loved this present world. Those which received the seed among thorns, are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choaked with the cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring forth no fruit to perfection**. *They that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*†. But,

2. The Christian, in his way to heaven,

* Luke viii. 14. † 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

has to overcome, not only the allurements, but likewise the terrors of the world.

The friendship of the world is enmity with God; so that whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God *. Therefore said our Saviour to his disciples, *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you* †. On this account the apostle hath affirmed, *that all that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.* The experience of every age confirms the truth of this observation. Persecution, of one kind or another, is, in a greater or less degree, the common lot of all real Christians. Sometimes it breaks out in open rage and violence, attacking their persons, their property, and even their life. We read of some who had *trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of*

* James iv. 4. † John xv. 18, 19.

bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented: (of whom the world was not worthy;) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

At other times, though the enmity of the seed of the serpent against the seed of the woman, is restrained by various circumstances, from breaking out into acts of open violence, it still shews itself with no less evidence in other ways—by stirring up opposition to serious godliness, and provoking to slander, calumny, and unjust reproach. All this the Christian is called to overcome. He must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Christ. *Whosoever*, says he, *shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he comes in his own glory, in the glory of his Father, and of the holy angels. But whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which*

is in heaven. He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you *.

Such, Christians, is the warfare in which you must engage, if you would obtain the prize of your high calling in Christ Jesus. Like good soldiers you must learn to endure hardness, rising superior to the smiles and frowns of the world, unallured by its flatteries, and undismayed by its terrors. An arduous contest, indeed, but one that is truly glorious: a contest, in which thousands, once weak and fallible as we, have proved victorious, and are now arrayed in white robes, with palms in their hands, before the throne of God and of the Lamb.

* Matth. x. 32, 39. and v. 11, 12.

This naturally brings me to the

Second general head of discourse, which was, to shew, how the Christian's faith enables him to obtain the victory over the world.

Here it is necessary to inquire, what is that faith to which such powerful and glorious effects are ascribed. Faith, in general, is described by the apostle to be *the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.* It has a respect to things invisible and future. It gives them a real and proper subsistence in the mind, representing them, not as mere probabilities, but as absolute certainties, on which it may rely with the firmest credit, and the most unsuspicious confidence. But the faith of the Christian has a peculiar respect to the testimony of God, respecting his Son Jesus Christ. And therefore the Apostle, after he had affirmed in the text, *This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,* immediately subjoins, *Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*

This proposition, that *Jesus is the Son of God*, is the very sum and substance of the gospel. It is a truth which comprehends in it, by necessary connection and consequence, all the grand and fundamental doctrines of the gospel. For, if Jesus be the Son of God, in the high and exclusive sense in which this title is ascribed to him in Scripture, then, the atonement which he made when he offered up himself without spot unto God, must be every way perfect. If the atonement which he offered be every way perfect, then God is reconciled, justice is satisfied, the law is magnified, and the most unworthy sinner who feels his need of mercy, and relies for it on this atonement, is safe for eternity, and may rejoice in hope of the glory of God. These truths, my Brethren, are inseparably connected. They form so many links of the same chain; and the belief of them is essentially necessary to that faith by which the world is overcome.

It has become fashionable in the present day to represent these, and the other peculiar doctrines of Christianity as mere mat-

ters of opinion, subjects of speculation which have no immediate connection with practice, and of which a man may without danger entertain his own ideas. The apostle was evidently of a different opinion, when he declared, *This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith;* and when he boldly challenged the adversaries of the gospel to produce a single instance of this victory having ever been obtained by any other means, *Who is he that overcometh the world,* but *he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.*

Let us now attend to this important part of the subject, and consider, how the faith of a Christian enables him to obtain the victory—first, over the allurements; and, secondly, over the terrors of the world.

1. Faith enables the Christian to overcome the allurements of the world, by shewing him the vanity and unsatisfying nature of all earthly enjoyments.

The world does not appear in its true colours to those who do not look beyond it to an unseen and everlasting state. It assumes a false and deceitful appearance, somewhat like those enchanted scenes which fabulous writers tell us deceived the unwary traveller. Thus, unthinking men, blinded by the devices of Satan and the deceitfulness of their own hearts, pursue the vanities of life, forming to themselves a thousand schemes which are never realised, ever complaining of the sad disappointment of their hopes, yet still pursuing the empty shadows which elude their grasp. But faith dissolves the enchantment. It draws aside the veil, and shews us, with convincing evidence, how vain and unsatisfying those objects are which are most highly valued by worldly men. It presents to our mind the cross of Christ, and discovers to us its infinite importance and value. And O! my Brethren, how much does the believing contemplation of this glorious object darken the lustre of the world in our eyes! What contempt does it pour upon all its boasted honours, and riches, and pleasures! He who

was the prince of life, and the Lord of all things was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. Poverty, reproach, persecution, and death was the portion which he possessed in this world. How poor and inconsiderable, then, must earthly enjoyments appear, in the estimation of him whose judgment is always according to truth. 'Why should I covet 'great things in the world, when my blessed Master had not where to lay his head? 'Why should I wish to stand high in the 'esteem of that world which crucified my 'best Friend and beloved Saviour? Let others eagerly pursue the vain trifles of life; 'let them heap up gold as the dust of the 'earth; let them pant after fame; let them seek for happiness in the low and pitiful 'pleasures of sin—but *God forbid that I 'should glory save in the cross of our Lord 'Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.*'

Thus will the Christian reason, whose faith has taught him to look upon this world in its true and proper light.

2. The faith of a Christian enables him to overcome the allurements of the world, by pointing out to him the dangerous consequences of the unlawful pursuits of worldly men.

Faith opens to the mind boundless prospects beyond death and the grave. It teaches us to consider the remote, as well as the immediate consequences of our actions, to stretch forward our thoughts to the ultimate end of our being, and to pursue a plan which will infallibly secure our final and eternal happiness. But this is not the plan which most men pursue. Present ease, present interest, or present enjoyment is all that they have in view. The objects of a future and invisible state are too distant, and, in their apprehension, too uncertain, to have any abiding influence on their temper and conduct. But faith brings these objects near, and leads the mind attentively to consider the different ends of the righteous and the wicked. Does the world hold out to the Christian its fair and flattering charms? Does it tempt him with the prospect of

the wages of unrighteousness? or endeavour, with its Siren voice, to allure him into the forbidden paths of sensual indulgence? how feeble will be the influence of such temptations on the mind of that man, who, believing the threatening of God, is firmly persuaded that *the end of these things is death.* Faith enables him boldly to reply, 'How 'shall I do this great wickedness and sin 'against God? I see that the ways of sin 'lead down to the chambers of destruction, 'and therefore, *depart from me, ye evil do-* 'ers, *for I will keep the commandments of* 'my God. You say that such a thing is 'for my interest: but how can that be for 'my interest which would rob me of ever- 'lasting treasures? You tell me that such 'a life is a life of pleasure: Be it so. But 'shall I purchase a few momentary plea- 'sures at the expence of endless pain? I be- 'lieve the testimony of God, *that the wa-* 'ges of sin is death. I behold indignation 'and wrath, tribulation and anguish ap- 'proaching with swift and certain steps to 'overwhelm a world of ungodly sinners. By 'the eye of faith I survey the unbelieving

'and impenitent. I see the Judge descend-
'ing in the clouds. I hear the voice that
'will reach the deepest caverns of the grave,
'*Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment!*
'It is the sound of the last trumpet that
'summons assembled worlds to receive from
'the lips of the Judge their final and ever-
'lasting doom. Ah! what piercing accents
'are these that reach my ear! *Depart from*
'*me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, pre-*
'*pared for the devil and his angels!*—And
'is this the end of ungodly men? will these
'be the consequences of the unlawful pur-
'suits in which they are engaged? My
'soul, come not thou into their secret; but
'*flee these things, and follow after righ-*
'*teousness, godliness, faith, love, patience,*
'*meekness*, and all the graces which ought
'to adorn the Christian character, and
'which lead to peace, and life eternal.'

3. Faith enables the Christian to overcome the allurements of the world, by filling his soul with those pure and spiritual delights, which produce a disrelish for the perishing pleasures of sin.

The mind of man is restless in pursuing after happiness, and if it does not find it in religion, it is sure to seek for it in the world. But, blessed be God, true religion is no enemy to happiness. On the contrary, the faith of the gospel promotes it in the highest degree. There is a peace and a joy in believing, that the world knoweth not, a peace that passeth all understanding, and a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. The Christian's happiness is not all in reserve. Though it is only at the right hand of God that he expects fulness of joy, yet here he is often made to experience the foretastes of heaven. God sends forth the Spirit of his Son into the hearts of his people, as the earnest of their inheritance, and causes them, from happy experience, to say, *Thou hast put gladness in our heart, more than in the time when their corn and wine increased.* In the secret exercises of meditation, prayer, and praise; in the various acts of social worship, and in the solemn and delightful services of the sanctuary, the Christian experiences a pleasure which he would not exchange for all

that the world can bestow. Ah! my Friends, how do such joys as these embitter the pleasures of sin, and elevate the soul above the vanities and allurements of the world! How poor and contemptible, in comparison, are all its gay and glittering objects! 'What!' may the believer say, when solicited by these vanities, 'shall I pollute my sacred 'joys with the unhallowed streams of car-'nal delights? Shall I foolishly part with 'my heavenly birth-right, for any of the 'unsatisfying objects of this transitory 'state? No; I never can consent to such 'an exchange. Upborn on the wings of 'faith and hope, I can look down with in-'difference, and even with contempt, on 'the kingdoms of this world, and all the 'glory thereof. I covet not the poor pe-'rishing pleasures of sin. My soul aspires 'after nobler joys. In communion with 'my God, in the love of my Saviour, in the 'fellowship of the saints, and in the bright 'and boundless prospects of immortality, I 'find a new and increasing satisfaction 'which must for ever determine my choice, 'even were the flatteries and allurements of

'the world ten thousand times greater than 'they are.'

In this manner doth faith enable the Christian to obtain the victory over the allurements of the world. Let us now observe,

II. How faith enables the Christian to overcome its terrors.

1. It does so, by the gracious supports which it yields under every trial.

I do not speak here of the common calamities of life, such as pain or sickness, loss of substance, or of friends, to which all men are liable in the present state. Although, in these cases, faith affords the Christian the noblest support, yet the evils I have chiefly in view are those which are peculiar to the people of God, and which, in the course of divine providence, they are often called to endure, on account of their stedfast adherence to Christ and his service. These are the evils in the world, to which the apostle in the text seems particularly to

refer. And how great are the supports which faith affords to the Christian under every trial of this kind. Is he, for example, called to endure the trial of cruel mockings? Does he meet with much unmerited reproach because he refuses to comply with the sinful customs and practices of the world? In this case, he is supported by such declarations as these, *Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them as wool; but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.*

Does the opposition of the world proceed the length of open violence? Faith has still its support at hand, to confirm and encou-

rage the Christian, *Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flames kindle upon thee.*

Animated by such gracious encouraging words, the believer can even glory in tribulation. *My Brethren*, says an apostle, *count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.* On this account, it is represented as a peculiar privilege, to suffer for Christ's sake. *Unto you it is given, in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.* And to the same purpose it is elsewhere said, *Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him*

not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf. Such, my Brethren, is the wonderful efficacy of faith, in overcoming the terrors of the world.

2. Faith enables the Christian to overcome the terrors of the world by setting before him the example of the great Author and Finisher of our faith.

Our blessed Redeemer was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. No flatteries could allure, no threatenings could move his spotless and innocent soul. He vanquished every temptation, he triumphed over every enemy, and his victory is both the pattern and the pledge of ours. Hence the example of Christ is so frequently mentioned as a support and encouragement to Christians under every kind of suffering for conscience sake. *If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps. Who did*

no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously.

How confirming and animating to the Christian is such an example! 'I may be 'despised and persecuted by the world,' may he say, 'but I cannot be worse treated than my blessed Master. Why should 'I be unwilling to bear a little reproach for 'him who bore so much shame and contempt for me! Why should I shrink at taking up the cross in my way to heaven, when 'I behold the glorious Captain of salvation 'himself made perfect thro' sufferings? Why 'should I refuse the cup of affliction from 'his hands, who, to accomplish my redemption, drank the cup of wrath that was due 'to me for sin. Take courage then, O my 'soul, and march boldly on under the conduct of such a Leader, nor fear the difficulties and dangers of the way.'

3. Faith enables the Christian to over-

come the terrors of the world, by the glorious hopes with which it inspires him.

Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.

Blessed reviving words! How well fitted to bear up the mind under the greatest sufferings! What though we suffer now, if we shall reign hereafter! What though the way be strait and narrow, if it lead to the heavenly mansions! The journey may be troublesome, but the rest that remains is glorious. The passage may be stormy, but it will land us safe on Immanuel's happy shore.

Animated by these enlivening hopes, Moses, the servant of God, forsook the land of Egypt, and refused to be called the son of

Pharaoh's daughter, *choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.* Animated by these hopes, the believing Hebrews *took joyfully the spoiling of their goods: knowing in themselves, that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance.* Animated by the same hopes, the apostles and first teachers of Christianity relinquished all that was dear to them in the world, and were *willing to be accounted the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things.* For they reckoned that the sufferings of the present time were not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed; and that their light affliction, which was but for a moment, was working for them a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory. Hence that astonishing fortitude with which they encountered and surmounted every danger, rising superior to all the malice and rage of earth and hell.

In this manner, then, does faith enable the Christian to obtain the victory over the

terrors, as well as the allurements of the world. Such are the triumphs of this divine grace: such the wonderful effects of that glorious gospel which a blinded world neglects and despises.

I shall now apply this subject to some practical uses.

1. It furnishes us with a rule by which to judge whether our faith be genuine. Does it overcome the world? Does it render us superior to its smiles and frowns, its allurements and terrors? This is the certain and uniform effect of true faith in the gospel. But alas! my Brethren, how many professing Christians are evidently destitute of this faith, *walking after their own lusts*, and according to the course of this evil world. Did religion consist, as too many by their conduct seem to suppose, in bare speculative notions, or in mere external decency, then it would be no difficult matter to become a Christian. But if it requires something vastly superior to this; if to be a Christian indeed, it is necessary that a man be

born again; that he deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Christ; renouncing whatever he knows to be contrary to the will of God, and simply following the path of duty, however opposite it may be to his sinful inclination or worldly interest: if to be a Christian indeed, it is necessary, in some degree, to live above the world, to be dead to its vanities, and undismayed by its terrors, then how few are there to whom this character belongs. Yet this, my Brethren, is the religion that will stand the test. This is the Christianity so beautifully delineated in the New Testament, and so happily exemplified in the lives of the primitive Christians. Vain are our pretensions to the faith of the gospel, if the love of sin and of the world predominate in our heart. True faith never fails to purify the heart, and to overcome the world. It is a living, powerful, operative principle; and proves itself to be divine by the blessed effects which it produces on the temper and conduct. Let us not deceive ourselves, then, with a name to live if we are spiritually dead; with the mere form of godliness, if we are destitute of its

power. Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith; prove your ownselves. Are you indeed striving, under the influence of faith, to overcome the world? Are you setting yourselves in opposition to its sinful maxims, its evil customs, and its corrupt practices: Or, on the contrary, do you suffer yourselves without resistance to be carried down the stream of worldly pleasures and pursuits? Is passion or interest your great governing principle in the common intercourse of life? and, provided you attain the object of your wishes, have you little concern about what is to be done for God, for his cause, and kingdom, and glory in the world.

2. From what has been said, we may infer the danger of worldly prosperity.

How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God. For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. The difficulty which our Saviour expresses in these words arises

from the intoxicating notions of worldly prosperity. As a man's circumstances prosper, his temptations increase. A long continued course of worldly prosperity is apt to produce pride, self-sufficiency, forgetfulness of God, and insensibility to spiritual objects. Hence it is that we find so few in affluence or high rank who are possessed of real religion. Nay, how many instances are there of persons, who possessed some regard to religion whilst in low or moderate circumstances, who, on being raised to greater dignity and affluence, have thrown off every restraint, and become openly profane. Should not this consideration make us dread, rather than covet great things for ourselves in the world; since the higher we are raised, the more is the difficulty encreased of entering into the kingdom of God. Even on the minds of real Christians, what an unhappy influence often has worldly prosperity! How uncommon is it to behold a Christian maintaining the lively exercise of divine faith in the midst of ease and affluence! Outward prosperity, therefore, is not the common lot of the people of God.

It is not the most friendly soil for the growth of the Christian graces. This leads me to remark,

3. The benefit of sanctified afflictions.

O my Christian Friends, what cause have you to bless God for afflictions, for this, among other reasons, that they tend to promote your victory over the world! It has generally been found in experience, more difficult to overcome its smiles than its frowns. Prosperity has a natural tendency to attach us to present objects. But afflictions discover them in their true and proper light. They aid us in the exercise of faith. They quicken us to prayer, and raise our thoughts towards our heavenly rest. Bless God, then, ye afflicted followers of a crucified master. Envy not the men who are placed in more prosperous circumstances than yourselves. In various respects their situation is more dangerous than yours, and their difficulties in overcoming the world far greater, than you are well able to conceive.

It must be observed, at the same time, that there is no situation in which the power of faith in overcoming the world does not appear. Though in general *not many rich, not many mighty, not many noble are called*, yet, blessed be God, some such there have been in every age, who have proved distinguished ornaments to the Christian profession, and shewn the possibility of maintaining the strictest godliness in the most unfavourable situations.

Joseph was enabled to preserve his integrity, even when raised to the highest power among the idolatrous Egyptians. Daniel could dare to be devout among the courtiers of Babylon: And it is recorded of Cornelius, a centurion of the Roman army, that his prayers and his alms came up for a memorial before God. These, and many other instances that might be mentioned, shew, that, in every situation of life, this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

And now, Brethren, let me exhort all who hear me, earnestly to engage in this honourable warfare. All men have not faith. See then that you be possessed of this heavenly grace. Do not content yourselves with a cold wavering assent to the truths of Scripture, for this can never produce any lasting effect upon the temper and conduct. Apply yourselves closely to the study of those sacred oracles, which contain the words of eternal life. Remember that there is nothing in the world that concerns you so much as the salvation of your souls; and that a mistake here, may be attended with the most fatal and irretrievable consequences. Count all things but loss, then, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ; yea, dross and dung that you may win Christ, and be found in him.

If you are possessed of true faith, you shall become conquerors, and more than conquerors, through him that loved you. Sin, Satan, and the world will fall before you; and in due time you shall reach the end of your faith, and hope, and patience,

and be crowned with unfading glory and never-ending bliss. *Be strong*, therefore, *in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Take unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life.* And, for your encouragement, remember the cheering, animating words of the glorious Captain of our salvation, *To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am sat down with my Father on his throne.*

SERMON X.

THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

ACTS iv. 13.

And they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

THE success that attended the ministrations of Peter and John, and which seems to have been greatly promoted by the miracle which they had performed on the impotent man, who sat at the gate of the temple, alarmed and irritated the priests, Sadducees, and other enemies of the gospel at Jerusalem. Hoping by threats and violence to intimidate them into a compliance with their wishes, they laid hands on the apostles, and cast them into prison. Next day,

being brought before the council, and interrogated by what power, or in what name they had wrought this miracle, Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, immediately replied; *Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.*

Such a confession in such circumstances, discovered a mind conscious of the goodness of its cause, and nobly superior to the fear of man. It struck the Jewish rulers with admiration and awe. *When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived*

that they were unlearned and ignorant men, it is said *they marvelled.* They perceived in the manner, the language, and the whole behaviour of the apostles, something that bespoke an elevation of mind and dignity of character, far above the common standard. This filled them with wonder, as they knew that the apostles were men of low birth, and destitute of the advantages of a learned education.

The only way, therefore, in which they could account for it, was by recollecting, that they were the friends and disciples of Jesus, from whose society and conversation they supposed them to have acquired these superior endowments. *They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.*

Was a reflection of this kind naturally suggested to the members of the Jewish council, by the conduct of the apostles on this occasion; and do not you think, my Friends, that there must be something in the temper and conduct of real Christians

at all times, that will distinguish them from the men of the world among whom they live? Undoubtedly there is. Our circumstances, indeed, are different from those of the apostles and first Christians. There is not the same marked and visible distinction between the friends and enemies of the cross of Christ now, as when the profession of Christianity was attended with the risk of life, and every worldly comfort. The number of hypocrites and false pretenders to religion has always been greatest in peaceable times of the church. But the religion of Jesus itself, is the same in every age. Its opposition to the prevailing maxims and manners of the world is marked now, as really as it was in the days of the apostles; and it is still as certain, that we can have no title to the name of Christians, unless the same mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus.

Suffer me, therefore, in farther discoursing from these words, to point out to you what that temper and conduct is, by which you ought to be distinguished as the friends

of Christ; or, to use the beautiful language of our text, on account of which, others may take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus. This is a subject which can never be unseasonable, but which, I hope, will be listened to with peculiar attention by those who have so lately been professing their love to Christ at his own table*. You have there acknowledged him as your Lord and Master. You have enlisted yourselves under his banner. You have sworn allegiance to the King of Zion. If you would wish therefore to justify the sincerity of your professions, you must study to walk even as Christ also walked, and to manifest the happy effect of your connection with him in every part of your future conduct.

It is a common, but just observation, that a man is known by the company with whom he associates. *He that walketh with the wise shall be wise; but a companion of*

* Preached on the Lord's day after the dispensation of the Supper.

fools shall be destroyed. It is equally true, that a man's general spirit and manner will for the most part discover the company which he ordinarily frequents. On these principles, then, it might naturally be expected, that the Christian, the manwho has been with Jesus in the sense which I shall afterwards explain, should have something in his general temper and conduct, that will distinguish him from the rest of the world. We are all sensible of the influence which frequent intercourse with others produces on our minds. How naturally, and almost insensibly do we imbibe the sentiments and spirit of those whom we love and esteem. Nay, how apt are we, without intending it, to imitate them, even in their peculiarities and weaknesses. And is it possible to hold frequent converse with our God and Saviour, to dwell much on the contemplation of his adorable perfections, to take delight in his word and ordinances, and to enjoy his spiritual presence, without being transformed in some measure into the same image. When Moses descended from Mount Horeb, after having spent forty days and for-

ty nights in communion with God, a visible glory appeared in his countenance. His face shone so, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold him. In like manner will the Christian, *whose conversation is in heaven*, and who is accustomed to hold frequent communion with the Saviour by means of his word and ordinances, discover by his spirit, his language, and his behaviour that he has been with Jesus. He is a pilgrim and a stranger on the earth. His best enjoyments come from above, and therefore you may observe, in the tenor of his conduct something that bespeaks his acquaintance with the other world, and his regard to it, as the terminating object of all his hopes and wishes. But let us take a nearer survey of the Christian temper and character, that we may perceive more distinctly how we ought to walk, so that others shall take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus.

In judging of any character, there are four things that should be taken into ac-

count: Sentiments,—Temper,—Language, —and Outward Behaviour.

Now, let us consider the Christian character under these particulars, and observe how each of them is affected by a real experimental knowledge of the gospel of Jesus.

I. Let us consider the influence which a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus may naturally be supposed to produce on our leading sentiments and views.

These, it is evident, enter very deeply into the formation of a man's temper and character. *The light of the body is the eye.* The leading faculty of the soul is the understanding, or judgment. *If, therefore, the eye be single, the whole body shall be full of light; but if the eye be evil, the whole body shall be full of darkness.* A superficial enquirer may think, that opinions in religion are of very small importance, having little or no connection with the life and practice; but the truth is, however

much some men may act in direct contradiction to their acknowledged principles, there are none who really believe what they profess, but must, in some measure, be sensible of its influence upon their life and conduct.

A leading feature, then, in the character of a Christian, and one by which he may be known and distinguished as a disciple of Christ, is the sentiments which he entertains, in opposition to the false and dangerous maxims which prevail in the world.

A Christian is one who yields an entire and implicit submission to the authority of Christ, as revealed in his word. He has received the scriptures upon satisfying evidence as the word of God, and therefore he cannot, he dare not dispute the authority of any of the truths which it reveals. He is sensible there must be many things in a divine revelation above the reach of his limited capacity; but it is sufficient for him to know, that such and such things are clearly revealed. He believes, upon the testi-

mony of God, those things which his reason cannot fully comprehend, and submits his understanding, in matters that are beyond its reach, to the unerring dictates of divine wisdom. From the Scriptures of truth, therefore, the Christian takes his sentiments for the direction of his conduct. These sacred oracles he esteems as the infallible standard of right and wrong. Nor is he ashamed, though he should be accounted singular in his opinions, provided only he can be satisfied as to the mind and will of God in any particular matter.

Let us endeavour to illustrate this idea a little more fully, by pointing out some particular instances, in which our sentiments, if we are Christians, must essentially differ from those that currently prevail in the world, even among those that bear the Christian name.

I may begin, then, with that which is the first and fundamental principle of all religion, The nature and perfections of God.

How many false and erroneous notions concerning God have gone abroad into the world. Every man, forsaking the plain and consistent account given us of God in Scripture, frames to himself, as his pride or his passion dictates, an idea of his own fancy which he falls down and worships. The general notion that worldly men entertain of God is, that he is a Being of unlimited goodness, who will have all his creatures to be happy, and who is easily disposed to forgive any little faults (for such they are pleased to account their sins) with which they may be chargeable. But how different does the Christian, the man who has been with Jesus, and who takes his information from the sacred Scriptures, conceive of God. He knows, indeed, that God is a Being of infinite goodness, and unbounded loving kindness, and this inspires his confidence. But, at the same time, he considers him as just and holy in his dealings with his creatures, keeping mercy for thousands of them that love him, but by no means clearing the impenitently guilty. His acquaintance with the gospel of Jesus, that wonderful scheme of

salvation, which forms the great subject of the inspired writings, has rectified his notions of God, and taught him to entertain high and honourable conceptions of his moral character and government; so that now, while he rejoices in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, as reconciled by the death of his Son, he stands in awe of his power and majesty, and serves him with reverence and godly fear.

Again, as the Christian's ideas of God are very different from those of worldly men, so are his sentiments respecting himself. He has long ago laid aside the self-flattering views, which the pretended sons of wisdom give of the dignity of human nature, and the all-sufficient powers of man. Experience has taught him his own weakness and unworthiness. His high imaginations are cast down, and he now cordially assents to the mortifying and melancholy truth which the word of God reveals, and the history of every age confirms, that man is a fallen, and corrupted creature, that *the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart are e-*

vil, only evil continually; that *the carnal mind is enmity against God, not being subject to the law of God,* nor disposed to yield obedience to his will; and therefore, that *it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps,* and that if ever a fallen creature is restored to the lost image of his Maker, he must be born again, renewed by the Holy Spirit, and translated *from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.*

Again, in proportion to the humbling apprehensions which the Christian entertains of himself, are his admiring and exalted thoughts of the Redeemer. To the ignorant unenlightened mind, Christ has no form nor comeliness, nor is there any beauty in him that they should desire him. But the man who hath been with Jesus, has received some satisfying discovery of his matchless excellence and worth. His person, his character, his offices, and work, appear inestimably precious in his esteem. These he regards with the profoundest veneration and the highest delight. In them he places his

confidence and hope, while, with the apostle, he counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord; that he may win Christ, and be found in him, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God by faith.

Once more, the Christian's views of this and another world, are very different from those of the generality of mankind. The Christian considers this world as a dangerous wilderness, through which he has to pass to the Canaan that is above; and on its best enjoyments he perceives written in plain and legible characters, *Vanity and vexation of spirit*. A great part of mankind seem to live only for this world. Their hopes, their desires, their pursuits, are bounded by things seen and temporal; and, to judge by their conduct, you would think that this is all the portion they ever wish to enjoy. But the Christian, whose mind is enlightened from above, takes in a larger and more comprehensive view of things. He judg-

es with the apostle, that *the things which are seen are temporal, but that the things which are not seen are eternal.* He reckons, *that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed,* even with that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, which is reserved for the people of God in heaven. Eternity! O how vast does eternity appear in the Christian's esteem! How does it annihilate the world, and all its little trifling concerns! Wicked and ungodly men, whatever they may pretend, have no fixed and steady belief in the great realities of an invisible world; for, if they had, they could not live in the manner they do. But the man who hath been with Jesus, the genuine disciple of Christ, is one who acts on the well grounded and steady conviction of the great truths revealed in the word of God, relating to a future and eternal world. His faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. It gives a kind of subsistence (as the original word ὑποστασις signifies) to those future and distant objects which are conceal-

ed from the eye of sense. It brings them near, as it were, and represents them to the view of the mind, not as bare probabilities, but as absolute certainties, which are well entitled to the firmest credit, and most unsuspicious confidence.

I come now to consider,

II. The influence which a saving knowledge of the gospel ought to produce on the *Temper*.

By the temper, I mean the habitual frame or disposition of the mind, both towards God and our fellow-creatures. Indeed, however correct our religious views and sentiments may be, unless they have a corresponding influence on our temper, we have too good reason to fear that we are yet strangers to the grace of God in truth. I could willingly enlarge on this important branch of the Christian character, but agreeably to the general design of this discourse, I must only hint at a few particulars, in which I shall endeavour to keep in

view that great pattern of the Christian temper, exhibited by our blessed Lord, who in this, as well as in all other respects, hath left us an example that we should follow his steps.

The first thing I mention, by which the Christian temper is marked, and on account of which, others may take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus is *humility*.

This is the ground-work of the Christian character. It is the first lesson that is learned in the school of Christ, and that temper of mind, which, above all others, the gospel enjoins. A proud Christian is a contradiction in terms; for the very name *Christian* implies the renunciation of our own wisdom, works, and will; and a chearful submission to the righteousness, grace, and government of Christ. And where can we find, my Friends, such a bright pattern of humility as in the example of Christ himself? He was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God; yet he made

himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant. For almost thirty years of his life, he lived in obscurity, nor did he aspire to worldly grandeur, even after he entered upon his public ministry. He sought not honour from men, but patiently submitted to shame and reproach, in the prosecution of his great and generous designs. He condescended to men of low estate, conversing with the meanest, as readily as with the most wealthy or powerful, and refusing no acts of kindness to persons of any description who applied to him for relief. Such was the humble and lowly spirit of the great Author and Finisher of our faith: and surely it is meet that the disciple should be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord. Has the Christian been with Jesus? has he frequently contemplated his life and character? has he received likewise of his Spirit? and must not the same mind be in him, even that lowly self-denying temper, which will lead him to entertain just, and therefore low apprehensions of his own character and attainments, and to esteem others better than himself?

Again, nearly allied to the grace of humility is *meekness*, another eminent branch of the Christian temper.

Of this disposition, also, we have an admirable pattern in the life and conduct of our blessed Lord. As he was of a humble, so he was likewise of a meek and quiet spirit. Though he met with much unprovoked ill usage from his cruel and implacable enemies, he was never heard to employ passionate or irritating language in return. *When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.* On one occasion, when the Jews, without any just cause, took up stones to stone him, we find him, instead of shewing any resentment, endeavouring to calm their passions by this mild and gentle reply, *Many good works have I shewed you from my Father, for which of those works do ye stone me?* At another time, he rebuked his disciples for their intemperate zeal, in wishing him to call down fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans, who had shut their

gates against him; *Ye know not*, said he, *what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.* And at the concluding scene of his sufferings, when enduring all the pain and ignominy which the most inveterate malice could inflict, with what divine meekness and compassion did he pray for his murderers! *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!*

With such an example before him, can the Christian indulge an angry or revengeful spirit? Is there any man that is of a proud or passionate, of an implacable and unforgiving temper, who yet pretends to be a disciple of Him who was meek and lowly in heart? He may build himself up with vain hopes, but he is, he must be a stranger to the life and spirit of true religion. The man who hath been with Jesus must have learned of him who *endured the contradiction of sinners against himself*, a meek, a gentle, and peaceable disposition. He must have been taught after his example, to bless them that curse him, to do

good to them that hate him, and to pray for them that despitefully use and persecute him.

Charity, including love to God and man, is another important and comprehensive branch of a Christian temper, on account of which, others may take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus.

This is the very life and soul of true religion, without which, an apostle tells us, it would profit us nothing though we could speak with the tongue of men and of angels, though we had the gift of prophecy, and understood all mysteries, and all knowledge, though we had all faith, so that we could remove mountains, yea, though we bestowed all our goods to feed the poor, or even gave our bodies to be burned. This kind of love is a gracious principle, wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God, leading to hope, and trust, and delight in Him, and producing by its influence the fruits of righteousness in the life and conversation.

Such is the nature of love to God, considered as an inward principle, but I speak of it at present chiefly as an external mark of a Christian temper. And in this view I would observe, that wherever true love to God is felt, it will discover itself by unfeigned love to mankind. A Christian has the mind of Christ, who went about doing good, who maketh his sun to shine on the evil and good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust. Never did the world behold such an example of universal love, as was exhibited in the character of Jesus. His whole life was nothing else but a continued series of labours and sufferings in the cause of love. And of this he at last gave the most astonishing proof, by laying down his precious life upon a cross for our sakes. Under the constraining influence of this love, and with so bright an example before him, the Christian is formed to the habit of diffusive benevolence. He breathes a spirit of good-will to mankind, and rejoices in every opportunity of being useful to the souls and bodies of others, without respect to parties or interests. He commiserates,

and would, if in his power, alleviate, the miseries of all around him; and if his active services are restrained by want of ability, all have a share in his sympathy and prayers.

But while the Christian regards all mankind with a love of benevolence, he bears a special affection to those who are partakers of the faith and hope of the gospel. This is not confined to any particular sect or denomination, but extends to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. He rejoices in the image of God wherever he sees it, and in the work of God wherever it is carried on. A love so extensive and disinterested is one of the most amiable parts of the Christian temper. It is that which our blessed Lord recommends to his disciples as the distinguishing badge of their profession: *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.* 'This is the best evidence of your 'relation to me, and of your rightful claim 'to the character of my disciples. This is the 'most convincing proof to the world of the

'divine excellence of my religion, that ye 'have love one to another.' So it was in the early ages of Christianity, when the heathens were constrained to exclaim, *See how these Christians love one another!* Such indeed will always be the effect of the gospel, when received in demonstration of the Spirit and with power. It will produce a spirit of love and mutual forbearance. It will beget that charity, which, to use the beautiful language of the apostle, *suffereth long, and is kind, envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

I shall only add farther, that *submission* naturally and necessarily flows from the temper of love. This is two-fold, and in each it is absolute, and without reserve. The Christian submits to the revealed will of his Lord, as made known to him in Scripture. He aims to tread in his Saviour's footsteps,

and makes conscience of obeying all his commandments, without exception, and without hesitation.

Again, He submits to the providential will of God. He acquiesces in his wisdom, and chearfully resigns himself and all his concerns to the unerring disposal of his providence. Here likewise, as in the former instances, the example of Christ is held forth for his imitation. In the days of his flesh, he exhibited a bright pattern of the most perfect submission to the will of his heavenly Father. *Not my will, but thine be done*, were the words which he uttered in the garden of Gethsemane. *The cup which my Father hath given me*, said he at another time, *shall I not drink it?* Such was the language, such the spirit of him whom we call our Lord and Master; and the man that has been with Jesus cannot but possess something of the same patient and submissive temper.

From considering the temper, I now proceed to another branch of the Christian

character, intimately connected with it, which, for the sake of distinction, I mentioned under the general name of *language*. This was the

III. Particular to which I proposed to direct your attention. And, in the prosecution of the general plan, I shall very shortly endeavour, as under the former heads, to point out the influence which an experimental knowledge of the gospel of Jesus ought to produce upon a Christian's ordinary language or discourse.

Here I must be understood to have in view all the duties included in the proper government of the tongue, a most important branch of the Christian character, and so indispensably necessary, that without it an apostle tells us, all our religion is vain. *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.* Elsewhere we are told by the same apostle, that *the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; that it defileth the whole body, setteth*

on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire of hell: that it is *an unruly evil, and full of deadly poison: and,* says he, *if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.* Let us consider, then, in what manner the Christian, or the man that hath been with Jesus, will distinguish himself by the due government of his tongue.

First, A Christian's language will be distinguished for its *purity.*

No filthy communication ought to proceed out of his mouth, but such as is good and for the use of edifying. The language of any person ought certainly to express the disposition of his mind, agreeably to that rule of our Saviour's, *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.* A heart, therefore, that is purified by divine faith, must produce a language proportionably pure and spiritual.

The man that hath been with Jesus can find no pleasure in the conversation of the sensualist. He abhors the garment spotted by the flesh; and having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, accounts it a shame even to speak of those things that are done of them in secret.

Again, a Christian's language, or ordinary discourse will certainly be characterised by a constant regard to *truth.*

The Christian, as the child of God, who is truth itself, and who cannot lie, must bear this image of his heavenly Father. As the disciple of Jesus, also, he must imitate his blessed Master, who did no sin, and *in whose mouth guile was not found.* If therefore he has been with Jesus, the law of truth will be in his lips, and his tongue will be a stranger to all guile and deceit. In his ordinary intercourse with men, he will be careful to shun the most distant approach to lying or dissimulation, however it may be coloured over by specious names or pretexts. Even when provoked by the unjust calumnies of

the wicked, he will guard against the spirit of revenge, which would lead him to retaliate by circulating reports to their prejudice: and when, in the transactions of business, he is tempted to conceal what it is his duty to make known, he will study to resist the temptation, and in the simplicity of his heart, according to the apostolic direction, *speak the truth with his neighbour.*

Again, His language will likewise be *kind and inoffensive.*

He will, indeed, disdain to flatter, for he will not court the favour of men at the expence of integrity and truth; but, so far as truth and conscience will allow, his speech is winning and courteous. He affects not the airs of a Cynic. He wears not the gloom of superstition. But, though raised above levity, his conversation is easy and chearful, and far removed from that ill-natured and censorious spirit which is too often concealed under the more specious names of innocent raillery or thoughtless mirth. Remem-

bering that a man's character is one of his most valuable possessions, he will not dare to rob him of it by malicious insinuations; but will be silent, rather than concur with those who are disposed to slander a brother behind his back. In short, as his spirit is meekness, his language will be gentle and unoffending.

Besides all this, however, there must be something still more peculiar to the language of a Christian, in order to mark his connection and intercourse with Jesus. He will speak the language of Canaan, a language which, though it may be sometimes not unsuccessfully imitated by men who have never known the grace of God in truth, belongs essentially to those who are the citizens of Zion. This is what the apostle seems to mean, by having *our speech seasoned* with grace. It is to have a savour of godliness in the whole of our conversation, so that a stranger may take knowledge of us, as the Jewish rulers did of the apostles, that we have been with Jesus.

I acknowledge, that there is a time to keep silence, as well as a time to speak, and that much prudence is necessary in the management of religious conversation, lest we give that which is holy unto dogs, or cast our pearls before swine; but I am afraid we generally run to the opposite extreme, and from an excessive fear of appearing ostentatious, often betray the cause of religion, and neglect many a precious opportunity of doing good to the souls of men. He is but a faint-hearted Christian who in the company of worldly men, wants courage to bring in a word for Christ and religion; but he is worse, he is a traitor to the cause, and deserves not the sacred name of Christian, who can patiently sit, and hear the name of God blasphemed, his ordinances vilified, and every thing that is sacred made the subject of ridicule. A disciple of Pythagoras or of Plato, would surely have stood forth in the cause of his master, if maliciously or unjustly calumniated: but be astonished, O heavens! and be horribly afraid, O earth! a man, who bears the name of Christian, who professes love to Jesus, and

entertains the hope of being saved by him at last, mingles without fear in the society of the scorner and profane; and listens, without expressing his disapprobation, to things which ought not to be once named amongst Christians. To such, the alarming words of our Saviour may be justly applied, *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.*

It now only remains, that, in the

Fourth place, we consider the influence of an experimental knowledge of the gospel of Jesus on a Christian's *actions*, or outward behaviour.

This is the finishing part of the Christian character, the most unequivocal proof of the sincerity of our Christian profession, and that which gives a beauty, a lustre, and consistency to the whole.

What, then, are the actions, what the outward behaviour, that may naturally be expected to accompany the sentiments, the temper, and language which I have already illustrated?

1. Are the Christian's leading sentiments and views such as have been represented? Does he think honourably of God? Does he conceive humbly of himself? Is the Saviour precious to him? and does the world appear in his esteem what it really is, *vanity and vexation of spirit?* To such sentiments and views as these, his outward behaviour will correspond. As he fears and loves God in his heart, so you will observe him paying a sacred regard to all the positive institutions of religion. You will see him in his family worshipping the God of his fathers, and like pious Abraham, commanding his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord. You will observe his strong attachment to the word and ordinances of God, in opposition to those who either altogether slight the institutions of religion, or who give but a for-

ced and occasional attendance upon them. In obedience to the express command of God, he is particularly careful to remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy, so that no part of it may be spent in amusement, or unnecessary worldly business. An ungodly man, though accustomed to appear in the house of God, accounts the worship of God a burden, and is glad of an excuse for not attending; but the Christian can truly say, in the devout language of the Psalmist, *How amiable are thy tabernacles! a day spent in thy courts is better than a thousand: I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.* In a particular manner, he feels the warmest affection to that ordinance which is appointed for the express purpose of commemorating the Saviour's dying love; and so deeply impressed is he with a sense of his obligations to this love, that with the utmost readiness he embraces every opportunity of testifying before the world in this solemn and public manner, that he hath been with Jesus.

Farther, the Christian looks upon this world as vanity, and the next as all-important. In conformity therefore to this sentiment, he discovers a noble superiority to the world. He will not be over-solicitous to obtain its honours, or riches, or pleasures, nor be greatly cast down with its disappointments and losses; for, having his heart and his treasure in heaven, he looks out *for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* Yea, though every outward circumstance should seem to be against him, yet will he possess his soul in patience, in hope of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory that awaits him beyond the grave.

But again, is the Christian distinguished from the men of the world by having the same mind in him which was also in Jesus; a humble, meek, loving, and submissive temper? This also will shew itself in his outward behaviour. His humility, if he move in a superior station of life, will appear to the world, in the unaffected simplicity and condescension of his manners; or, if in an

inferior station, in a modest and unassuming behaviour, in submission to the lawful commands of his superiors, and in a chearful discharge of the duties belonging to his place in society.

His meekness will dispose him to bear with patience the injuries he may receive from his fellow-creatures, and, *as much as in him lies, to live peaceably with all men.* His love will shew itself in acts of kindness and humanity, according to his ability and opportunities. If providence has blessed him with affluence, he will not think it enough to say to his indigent brethren, *Depart in peace; be ye warmed, and be ye clothed:—while he gives not those things that are needful for the body.* Such a conduct is highly injurious to our fellow-creatures, and altogether inconsistent with the character of a real Christian. His love is not a dead unactive principle, satisfied with prayers and wishes, but proves a constant and powerful incitement to the practice of all that is just, and pure, and honest, and lovely, and of good report. And as the Chri-

stian's love disposes him to be liberal, generous, and tender-hearted, so the temper of submission leads to contentment with his lot, to the suppression of all murmuring and repining complaints, and to the conscientious improvement of those talents whatever they may be, that providence hath put into his hands.

Once more, is the Christian's language pure and spiritual, simple and devoid of artifice, kind and inoffensive, useful and edifying? his actions will correspond with his words. He will not beguile you with fair speeches, while deceit lurks in his heart. He will not make professions of friendship with his lips, while by his actions he is devising means to ensnare and to ruin you. Nor will he administer useful and salutary advice, without exemplifying his precepts in his own conduct and life. No; there ought to be no such inconsistencies in the Christian character. His conduct should be uniform, and in every situation he ought to be the same man, the same devout worshipper of God, the same obedient servant

of the Lord Jesus Christ, the same self-denying and watchful observer of his own temper, the same noble and generous lover of mankind.

Thus, Brethren, have I endeavoured to describe the Christian character, and particularly those parts of it that are more open to the observation of our fellow-creatures, and on account of which the world will take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus. Do we possess this character? Do we cherish the sentiments, feel the temper, utter the language, and exemplify the conduct which have been described? Alas! how rare is such a charac er! how much of Christian profession often exists, where nothing of the Christian spirit is felt! how many in words say that they have been with Jesus, and yet in works deny him! But be not ye deceived, my Brethren. It must be acknowledged, that the very best come far short of exhibiting that complete consistency and purity of character which intercourse with the Saviour ought to produce; but it is no less certain, that something of

the spirit and conduct which I have endeavoured to illustrate, must be found in every man who is a disciple of the Son of God in deed and in truth. Examine, therefore, your heart and life by this test. Guard against self-deception; and pray that any root of bitterness which springs up in your heart may be destroyed, and that the seeds of that faith which purifies the heart and overcomes the world, may be implanted in its room.

To the Friends of Jesus, I would particularly say, Study to attain more and more of the Christian character, that your relation to Him, whose disciples you are, may be more evident; that the gospel may be honoured by your conduct; and that God may be glorified in you and by you. For this purpose be jealous over yourselves with a godly jealousy. Watch against temptation. *Pray without ceasing.* Live by faith. Keep the cross of your Saviour steadily in your eye. *Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time.* Avoid unnecessary intercourse with

the world. *Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and,* I pray God, *your whole spirit and soul, and body be preserved blameless, unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Amen.

SERMON XI.

THE SAFETY OF BELIEVERS.

2 TIM. i. 12.

I know whom I have believed; and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

AT the time when Paul wrote this second epistle to Timothy, he was a prisoner at Rome, under Nero the Roman emperor, by whose unjust sentence he was soon afterwards beheaded. This eminent apostle, who had all along been so remarkable for his intrepidity and zeal, seems on this trying occasion to rise above himself, and displays in no common degree, those great and

noble virtues, which, at such seasons, support and adorn the Christian hero. He betrays no symptoms of uneasiness; he expresses no anxious concern respecting the death which he knew awaited him; but speaks of his approaching dissolution with a dignified composure, like one who was certain of future happiness. *For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand; I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

The mind is struck with the display of such magnanimity in circumstances of so much outward distress, and is naturally led to enquire, what were the grounds of this holy confidence and triumph? The apostle himself informs us, in the words of the text, *For the which cause*, i. e. for the sake of the gospel, *I suffer these things. Nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I*

have believed. 'My persecutors may de-
'stroy this mortal flesh. They may deprive
'me of the poor remains of a life which has
'already exhibited a scene of suffering and
'distress: but my best, my immortal in-
'terests are safely lodged in the hands of
'an almighty Friend. These they cannot
'possibly injure, for *I know whom I have*
'*believed*, and I am well assured, that none
'is able to pluck me out of his hands. He
'will not disappoint my expectations, but
'*will keep that which I have committed*
'*unto him* against the great day of his ap-
'pearing, when he shall present me fault-
'less before the presence of his glory with
'exceeding joy, and make it appear with
'divine evidence, that the light afflictions
'which I now suffer, are not worthy to be
'compared with the glory that shall then
'be revealed.'

What the apostle here says of himself, is equally applicable to every true believer. It directs our attention to the proper foundation of our faith and hope as Christians, to that which alone is fitted to support the

mind under the changing circumstances of life, and in the near prospect of death and eternity.

In farther discoursing on these words, I propose, through the divine assistance, to confirm and illustrate the doctrine contained in the text, *viz.* That every true believer, who has committed his eternal interests into the hands of Christ, may rest assured, that He will keep that which is committed unto him against the great day of his appearing.

With this general view, I shall consider,

I. The grounds upon which this comfortable persuasion is built. And,

II. The manner in which it is produced and promoted in the souls of true believers.

I. Let us enquire, what are the grounds of the comfortable persuasion expressed in the text?

Our faith, if it be genuine, is built upon knowledge. Let the Athenians rear their altars to *The Unknown God*, we cannot, we dare not commit the interests of our immortal souls into the hands of an unknown Saviour. The meanest, and least informed Christian can say with the apostle, *I know whom I have believed.* He may not understand all mysteries and all knowledge, but he knows as much of the Saviour as engages his trust and confidence, and enables him to give a reason of the hope that is in him with meekness and fear.

In illustrating these grounds of hope and confidence, we may consider the personal qualifications of Christ as a Saviour, and his special character and commission as appointed by the Father to that important office.

With regard to the personal qualifications of Christ, I observe,

1. He is infinitely powerful. This perfection belongs to him as the true and eter-

nal God, the equal of the Father, of whom, and to whom, and through whom are all things. He is the Maker and ruler of the universe. *By him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are on earth; whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities or powers: all things were created by him and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.* There is no creature that is not subject to his controul; nor is there any power in heaven, or earth, or hell that can resist his omnipotent arm. He is the *Mighty God*, and all, in one way or another, must bow to his sceptre. This the believer knows, and therefore, with the most perfect confidence, he commits his eternal interests into the hands of this almighty Saviour, *persuaded that he is able to keep that which is committed unto him against that day.* He knows that the same power which formed him at first, is able to create him anew after the divine image—that there is no iniquity so strong, which the power of God cannot subdue—no duty so difficult which the arm of omnipotence cannot enable him

to perform. Should all the wicked on earth, or all the devils in hell conspire to ruin his soul, he knows that he is safe under the protection of Him who rules the universe. Satan himself is a chained enemy, who tempts only by permission, and who can proceed no farther against any of the saints than He who is the great Shepherd of the sheep is pleased to allow. In short, if God be for us, who can be against us? if Omnipotence be engaged on our side, what is there within us or around us, that can endanger our happiness? To this all-powerful Redeemer, therefore, we may safely commit our eternal interests.

2. He is infinitely wise. He knows the most secret devices of the enemies of our salvation. Hell is open before him, and in his sight destruction hath no covering. He can confound the policy of the powers of darkness, and overturn their best laid schemes; nay, he can render the devices of his enemies subservient to the accomplishment of his own gracious purposes, and bring glory to himself, and comfort to his

people out of those very circumstances, which, in their own nature, seem to have the most opposite tendency. And as he thus confounds the wisdom of his enemies, so his own designs are formed with unerring skill. All things are naked and open to his eyes; and, in ways the least perceivable by us, he often fulfils the purposes of his grace. *He knows how to deliver the godly out of every temptation*, and to *preserve them safe to his heavenly kingdom.*

With what joyful confidence, then, may the believer, who is persuaded that the Redeemer is *God only wise*, commit his eternal interests into his hands. He who balances the clouds, and guides the stars in their courses, who rules in the hearts, and manages the counsels of men, whose eye pervades the deepest recesses of darkness, and the most subtle policy of hell, this infinitely wise and all-perfect Being is surely able to manage the concerns of our precious and immortal souls. No artifice can elude his search. No circumstance, the smallest or most inconsiderable, can escape his ob-

servation; and if he but undertake to save our guilty souls, he will certainly perfect that which concerneth us. His unsearchable wisdom therefore qualifies him to be a Saviour to blind and ignorant creatures, such as we acknowledge ourselves to be.

3. His love and compassion are equal to his wisdom and power. Though this is not expressed, it is evidently implied in the text. For with what confidence could the apostle commit his immortal interests into the hands of Christ, unless he had been persuaded of his care and compassion, as well as of his ability to keep that which was committed unto him. Blessed be his name, we have the fullest and most satisfying evidence of this delightful and encouraging truth. The whole of his undertaking to save sinners, is a convincing proof of his love and compassion to the souls of men. For what but this could move the Son of God to veil his glory in a human form, and submit to such unexampled sufferings for our sakes. His love was stronger than death. Many waters of affliction could not quench

it; neither could the floods of death drown it. It brought him from heaven to earth; it made him willing to submit to pain and poverty, to contempt and reproach, to envy, persecution, and all the thousand nameless ills which fall to the lot of mortality. Nay, it reconciled him to that bitterest of all the ingredients in his cup of suffering, the hidings of his Father's face. Every wound which he felt in his sacred body, every pang which affected his holy and innocent soul, the nails which fastened his hands and feet to the accursed tree, the spear which pierced his side, his bitter agonies and dying groans, all proclaim, as with ten thousand tongues, the strength and tenderness of his love to men. And now that he is gone to heaven, as he said, can we once entertain the thought that his love and compassion are less than when he trode Gethsemane, or bowed his head on Calvary? Far be such unworthy thoughts from our minds. Our great High Priest in his exalted state, retains the same loving and gracious heart, as in the days of his deepest abasement. He liveth to make intercession

for all who come to the Father by him. *He* invites the weary, the worthless, and wretched to take shelter from the wrath to come, under the covert of his wings. He assures them all, without exception, of the most hearty welcome, and even beseeches them to be reconciled to God, and to become partakers of the unsearchable riches of his grace. With what assured trust and confidence then may the believer commit his eternal interests into the hands of this loving and compassionate Saviour! He is not only infinitely wise and powerful to manage the momentous concerns of our souls, but infinitely condescending and gracious to undertake this solemn charge. And therefore may the believer say, 'I can safely in-'trust him with my best and most import-'ant interests. Though my guilt be ex-'ceedingly great, I know there is virtue in 'the blood of Christ to atone for it all. 'Though my corruptions be many and 'strong, His grace is sufficient for me, and 'his strength is made perfect in weakness. 'His love and compassion are equal to his 'power. He will not therefore forsake the

'work of his own hands, nor suffer me to be 'ashamed of the hope and confidence which 'I repose in him.' Once more,

4. He is unchangeably faithful. His name is the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness. His gifts and calling are without repentance, and therefore he *rests in his love*, and keeps his people by his mighty power through faith unto salvation. *If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.* In the hour of darkness and despondency, Zion may say, *The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me: But can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee,* saith the Lord. *Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.* He is ever mindful of the interests of his people. His eye is continually upon them for good, and his ear is ever open to their cry. *Because he lives, they shall live also. Their life is hid with Christ in God; and when*

Christ who is their life shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory.

Where then can our immortal interests be so safely lodged, as in the hands of this faithful Saviour? With what confidence may the believer commit all that is dear to him to the keeping of this unchangeable Friend! *This God is our God for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death.* 'Crea-'tures may change, but the Saviour in 'whom I trust,' may the believer say, 'liv-'eth and changeth not. He is *the same* '*yesterday, to-day, and for ever;* the same 'in his wisdom and power, the same in his 'compassion and love, who will never leave 'nor forsake the soul that trusts in him. 'On him, therefore I cast all my care, and '*though an host should encamp against me,* '*I will not fear; though war should arise* '*against me, in this will I be confident,* for '*the Lord is my light and my salvation,* '*he is the strength of my heart, and my* '*portion for ever.*'

These, then, my Brethren, are some of the personal qualifications of Christ, which render him every way fit to perform the office of a Saviour. But I mentioned, as

A *Second* ground of this comfortable persuasion—the special appointment and commission of Christ to the office of Mediator.

This our Saviour often mentions, when speaking of the commandment which he had received from his Father. *This is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.* For this purpose *all power in heaven and in earth is committed to him;* and he is said to be *the Head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.* As no creature was equal to the arduous task of saving a guilty world, God was pleased to lay our help upon one who was mighty to save. He committed the charge of our immortal interests into the hands of his own

beloved Son, who, having freely undertaken, fully accomplished, the work that was given him to do.

Here, then, is the firmest ground for the faith and confidence of believers. The Saviour in whom they trust is not only possessed of the highest personal qualifications, but was likewise expressly commissioned and appointed by the Father to employ these for the salvation of sinners. Christ and the Father, who are one in nature and perfections, are united in this glorious design. Hence the words of our Lord himself, *I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hands. My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.*

Convinced, then, that the concerns of our souls are infinitely important, where should we lodge them but in his hands to whom the Father hath committed them. 'I 'know,' may the believer say, 'that the

'Father hath committed all judgment to 'the Son. He is the only Mediator be-'tween God and man; the Way, the Truth, 'and the Life, by whom alone we can have 'access to the Father. And shall I not 'choose him for my guardian, with whom 'the Father has entrusted the care of all 'his chosen? Shall I not confide in him as 'my Saviour, who is so dear in the sight of 'his heavenly Father, as well as every way 'qualified in himself for discharging this 'high and honourable office?'

Thus it appears, from the special character and commission of Christ, as well as from his personal qualifications, how admirably fitted he is for the office which he sustains.

I come now, as was proposed,

II. To point out the manner in which this persuasion is produced and promoted in the souls of true believers.

It will occur to every person who reads the words of the text with attention, that they are the words of a confirmed, established believer; of one who has tasted that the Lord is gracious, and who, under the effectual teaching of the Spirit of God, is brought to a settled, and comfortable persuasion of his own personal interest in the blessings of salvation. Upon what grounds this persuasion is built, has been illustrated under the former head of discourse. We shall now consider how, or in what manner the believer arrives at such a knowledge of Christ, as is sufficient to produce and promote this happy persuasion. And here I would observe, that this knowledge is derived, partly from testimony, and partly from experience.

1. The knowledge of Christ, which is necessary to produce and promote the comfortable persuasion expressed in the text, is partly derived from testimony.

This, properly, is what we call *faith*; a principle which becomes more firm and cer-

tain, in proportion to the number and character of the witnesses on whose testimony it rests. Now the witnesses to the power and faithfulness of Christ are so numerous and so credible, that the faith of a Christian is built on the most solid and rational grounds. Let us shortly consider who these witnesses are, and what their testimony is.

God the Father has in all ages borne witness to the power and faithfulness of his own beloved Son, our blessed Saviour. This he did of old time by visions and voices, by prophecies and typical ordinances. It is of Jesus and of his power and grace to save, that *God hath spoken by the mouths of his holy prophets, which were since the world began.* He was the person described to our first parents, as the seed of the woman who should bruise the head of the serpent. He was the Son promised to Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed; the Prophet like unto Moses, whom God was to raise up from among his brethren; the Man of sorrows, and the Mighty God, foretold by I-

saiah; the Righteous branch, the King of Israel, the Desire of all nations, the Sun of righteousness, celebrated in such rapturous strains by the other prophets, who were successively raised up to bear witness to his excellence and glory.

The typical institutions under the Old Testament dispensation prefigured his future incarnation. The sacrifices under the law pointed to his great atonement; the ark and the mercy-seat, the tabernacle of testimony, and the temple of Solomon, the molten sea and the golden altar, were so many different emblems of the fulness of that salvation which he came to accomplish.

Accordingly, when the fulness of time was come, God the Father bore testimony to his Son, by sending a heavenly host to announce his birth, by kindling a star in the east, which conducted the wise men to the manger at Bethlehem, and by reviving the spirit of prophecy in Simeon and Anna, who hailed him as *a light to lighten the*

Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel. At his baptism, also, and afterwards at his transfiguration, a solemn, and public attestation was given to his character and office, when the Father declared, by an audible voice from heaven, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

Christ himself, likewise, thus testifies concerning his own power and readiness to save, *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*; and *whosoever cometh unto me, him I will in no wise cast out.* All the predictions respecting the Messiah were accomplished in him; the doctrines which he taught, the life which he led, and the miracles which he wrought, all united in confirming and proving the truth of his mission, and, consequently, of his ability and willingness to save.

Nor must the testimony of the Holy Spirit be forgotten. *It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.* He dwelt in Jesus without measure. He unit-

ed with the Father in the testimony given to the Son at his baptism, for at that time *the Spirit of God* was seen *descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.* The miracles which Christ performed are expressly ascribed to his influence *; and on the day of Pentecost, when not only miraculous gifts were bestowed on the apostles, but when above three thousand souls were converted, the promise was fulfilled, *I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

These are the three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and as these three are one in nature and perfections, so they agree in their testimony. *This is the record, that God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*

But, besides this divine testimony, there are other witnesses to the power and faith-

* Matth. xii. 28.

fulness of Christ. All the saints who lived in former times, the whole company of the faithful, all the patriarchs and prophets, the apostles and martyrs, bear testimony to this interesting fact. They all died in the faith of its comforting truth, and are now before the throne, clothed in white robes, with palms in their hands, proclaiming as with one voice that Jesus is mighty to save.

Our fellow-Christians, likewise, in the present day, may be produced as witnesses to the power and faithfulness of the Redeemer. They live in different and distant places; their cases are various, and their attainments unequal; but they all will unite in declaring, that ever since they were enabled to commit their souls to Christ, they have found a peace and joy to which they were strangers before, and that not one word of all that he hath spoken hath failed to be accomplished.

On what a sure foundation, then, does the faith of a believer rest! on nothing less than a divine testimony, confirmed by the

concurring evidence of a great cloud of witnesses in every age. In this manner does the believer attain to such a knowledge of the Saviour, as produces and maintains in his soul the comfortable persuasion expressed in the words of the text. But I observed,

2. That this knowledge is likewise in part derived from the believer's own experience.

The apostle speaks here like one who had passed through many dangers and trials, and who, in all the situations in which he had been placed, had experienced the care and compassion of his faithful Redeemer. Such, in some degree, is the case with all true believers. Though at first they are induced, by the report of others, to commit their best interests into the hands of Jesus, yet, from what they afterwards experience of his power and grace on their own souls, they can say, as the men of Samaria did to the woman who first told them of Christ, *Now we believe, not because of thy saying,*

for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

From these sources, from experience as well as faith, is that knowledge derived, of which the apostle speaks in our text. 'I 'was guilty, wretched, and hopeless,' may the believer say, 'when the joyful sound of 'the gospel first brought peace to my mind. 'I saw myself condemned by the sentence 'of God's righteous law, and my heart me- 'ditated nothing but terror; but the view 'of a crucified and risen Saviour removed 'my fears. I beheld the Almighty Father 'seated on a throne of grace, and heard 'him with infinite complacency proclaim- 'ing from the exalted glory, *This is my be- 'loved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* 'And *I know whom I have believed,* for 'still, under the alarms of new guilt, my 'soul betakes itself to this blessed refuge; 'and I find, that nothing can pacify my 'conscience but this precious blood of 'sprinkling.

'I was a slave to divers lusts and pas-
'sions, carried captive by the devil at his
'will: I was a daring rebel against the Ma-
'jesty of heaven, and a presumptuous trans-
'gressor of his holy law. But the Re-
'deemer, who is mighty, released me from
'this degrading bondage. In the day of
'his power he broke the fetters in which
'I had long been held. And *I know whom*
'*I have believed;* for though, alas! iniqui-
'ties still prevail against me, though I am
'daily receiving fresh proofs of my sinful
'corrupted nature, yet I trust the power of
'sin is destroyed, and that I truly hate and
'forsake those things in which I formerly
'delighted. I well know to whose grace I
'am indebted for this happy change. I
'was utterly unable of myself to perform
'the duties, to endure the afflictions, or to
'resist the temptations of life. But I know
'whom I have believed. I know who it is
'that has helped me in numberless difficul-
'ties; who it is that has strengthened me
'with singleness of heart, though with ma-
'ny imperfections, to fulfil the duties of
'my station; who it is that has enabled me

'to bear sharp, and long-continued afflic-
'tions with chearfulness and composure;
'who it is that has fortified my mind a-
'gainst the various snares and temptations
'incident to my situation in life, the least
'of which, I am conscious, must have prov-
'ed too powerful, without his gracious aid;
'and therefore, weak and inconstant as I
'feel myself to be, I bless him I can say,
'that, *by the grace of God I am what I*
'*am.*'

In this manner does the believer, by his own experience, attain a knowledge of the Redeemer's power and faithfulness. Reasoning from the past to the future, he is encouraged to put an unlimited confidence in Him *who hath delivered, and doth deliver, and in whom he trusts that he will yet deliver;* being persuaded that *he is able to keep that which he has committed unto him against that day.*

Thus have I endeavoured to illustrate and confirm the proposition contained in the text, That every true believer who has

committed his eternal interests into the hands of Christ, may rest assured that he will keep that which is committed unto him against that day, by shewing you,—I. Upon what ground this comfortable persuasion is built; and, II. In what manner it is produced and promoted in the souls of true believers.

It now only remains, that I conclude this discourse with a few practical reflections from what has been said.

1. How much are they to be pitied, who have no interest in the Saviour, who have never been thoroughly convinced of their wretched and helpless condition as sinners, and who, consequently, have not committed the infinitely momentous concerns of their souls into the hands of Christ.

Alas! how many are in this situation, living without God, and without hope in the world! How many seem to be satisfied with their part and portion in the present life! Let them only enjoy health and ease, wealth and honour, and they sit down con-

tented, saying to themselves, as the rich fool in the parable, *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.* But how soon must this enchantment be dissolved! how soon must the eyes of these unhappy men be opened to perceive, that what they blindly consider as substantial good, is only the shadow of happiness; whilst the things which they were accustomed to consider as the chimeras of a gloomy imagination, are found to be great and awful realities! What shall they do, or how shall they appear in that day, when *the secrets of all hearts shall be manifest*, and *every man shall receive according to the deeds done in the body, whether they have been good or bad;* when the Judge shall ascend the throne, and summon all the quick and the dead to appear before him, to answer for the improvement which they have made of their several talents? Then, and not till then, will it be known of what importance it is to have the interests of our souls safely lodged in the hands of the Almighty Saviour. O that sinners would think of this

whilst it may avail them, and not sacrifice concerns of such infinite importance, to the vain pursuits of a perishing world!

But merely to be convinced of the importance of this subject, and to entertain some serious thoughts about salvation, is not sufficient, unless we have actually committed our interests to the Saviour, and are *looking for the mercy of God*, through him, *unto eternal life*. Men may be convinced of their danger, and seriously concerned about their souls, and yet be far from obtaining eternal life, if they are deceiving themselves with a false hope, with a hope that rests on any other foundation than the finished work of Christ. Let us take good heed unto ourselves, therefore, lest our hopes fail us in the day of the Lord. *That day will try every man's work of what sort it is.* O that our hope may be such as will stand the test! a hope built upon the Rock of ages, which will never make us ashamed; a hope that will support us through all the changing circumstances of life, yield us solid comfort at the hour of death, and ena-

ble us to lift up our heads with joy at the eventful period, when assembled worlds shall receive their final and everlasting doom.

2. That we may abound more and more in this hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost, let us study to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith, we have seen, is built upon knowledge, and the more knowledge any Christian possesses, the more confirmed and established will his faith be; and consequently, the more will his hope and joy in the Lord increase. What is the reason that many Christians are so subject to doubt and despondency, that every change in the state of their minds shakes the ground of their spiritual confidence, so that they are often alarmed, and tremble as if all was lost? Is it not, in a great measure, owing to the imperfection of their knowledge, to their want of clear and comprehensive views of divine truth, and to their laying an unwarrantable stress on sudden and warm affections, in-

stead of applying their minds to the solid and permanent grounds of Christian faith? There can be no abiding joy that does not spring from faith, and there can be no true faith that is not built upon knowledge. It was the knowledge of the Redeemer's power and faithfulness to save, that raised the apostle to the blessed assurance which he expresses in the text. It was for this most excellent knowledge that he counted all things but loss. And if we would wish, my Brethren, to rise to the same exalted triumphs of faith and hope, we must be determined to know nothing so much as Jesus Christ and him crucified; we must study daily to acquire a fuller and more impressive acquaintance with the power and wisdom, the faithfulness and compassion of the great Redeemer.

Above all, let us seek after an increasing experimental knowledge of the Saviour. Experience is the best of all knowledge, and that which will most certainly yield us the greatest comfort in the season of distress, and at the hour of death. To promote

struction. When he hides his face, it is not to drive them away from his presence, but to excite them with greater earnestness to seek the light of his countenance. With the bowels of a father, he observes the first breathings of their souls after him; and when, by means of his chastening rod, they are brought to that temper of mind which by their affliction he meant to produce, he either removes the trouble, or supports and strengthens them under it. This filial temper is admirably expressed in the words of the text, *Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more. That which I see not; teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.*

Considering the words in this view, I propose, through divine assistance, more fully to explain the temper of mind becoming a child of God in the season of affliction. In doing which, I shall observe the order naturally suggested by the words of the text.

In general, then, we may remark, that a child of God in the time of affliction will naturally apply to his heavenly Father, as the wise and gracious disposer of all events. *Surely*, says Elihu, *it is meet to be said*, or spoken, *to God.*

Reason, as well as Scripture, may teach us, that *affliction cometh not from the ground, neither doth trouble spring out of the dust.* Though *man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward,* the world is not left, as some have supposed, to the direction of blind chance, but is under the government of a Being infinitely wise and good, who ordereth all events to the best and noblest purposes. But how few are there who rightly acknowledge the providence of God in the afflictions that befal them. Most men weary themselves and others with complaints of the greatness of their trouble, as if thereby they could obtain relief from the burden under which they labour. But how vain, how unavailing are such complaints! Miserable comforters will the best of men be found, if God withdraw himself. He,

and He alone is the effectual Comforter, the Physician of great value. Hence the exhortation of James, *Is any afflicted? let him pray.* One short petition, addressed to God in the exercise of faith, will go farther to relieve the mind under the pressure of affliction, than many words spent in converse with our fellow-creatures. To this quarter, therefore, the afflicted child of God betakes himself for relief, sensible that whatever may be the kind or the occasion of his trouble, it is the hand of God that smites him. Nor does he smite without a cause. His sins are immediately brought to remembrance, and in such penitential language as this, he pours out his soul to his heavenly Father, *I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more. That which I see not, teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.*

In which words you may remark,

I. A humble confession of God's justice in afflicting.

II. A prayer for divine teaching. And,

III. A pious resolution, founded on this confession and prayer.

I. Let us attend to the humble confession in the text. *I have borne chastisement:* that is, I have suffered justly; nay, I have been punished less than mine iniquities deserve.

It is common in scripture to represent afflictions, particularly the afflictions of believers, as chastisements from God. As a tender-hearted father corrects the child in whom he delights, so the Lord visits the transgressions of his people with the rod, and their iniquities with stripes. Hence the apostle thus addresses the believing Hebrews, *Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening,*

God dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is there whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons *. A servant or a stranger who commits a fault is dismissed without correction—but a child of the family, who displeases his father, is chastened for his offence, and restored to favour.

The particular afflictions of the people of God are not indeed always sent on account of particular sins, but there is enough of sin in the best of men to justify the severest sufferings with which they may be visited in a present world. Hence we find, that in their heaviest afflictions they have never failed to justify God in his dealings towards them, while they have taken shame to themselves on account of their sins. Thus, says David, *I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it* †. And again, *I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faith-*

* Heb. xii. 5, 6, 7, 8. † Psal. xxxix. 9.

fulness hast afflicted me *. In like manner, Eli, bowing with meek submission under the hand of God, says, *It is the Lord, let him do unto me what seemeth him good* †. In still stronger language does the church express herself in the book of Lamentations. *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. Wherefore should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins* ‡? In the prophecies of Jeremiah, Ephraim is introduced bemoaning himself thus: *Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned I repented, and after that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth* ‖.

'Father,' says the relenting penitent, '*I* '*have borne chastisement, I will not offend*

* Psal. cxix. 75. † 1 Sam. iii. 18.
‡ Lam. iii. 22. ‖ Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

'*any more.* I have sinned against heaven
'and before thee, and am not worthy to
'be called thine. I bless thee for that sea-
'sonable correction which reclaimed me
'from my wanderings, and taught me again
'to place my chief happiness in thy favour
'and enjoyment. *Before I was afflicted*
'*I went astray.* I left my guide, I lost
'my way, and I might have still been wan-
'dering in the deceitful paths of sin, had
'not thy merciful rod broken the snare.
'O that I may not offend any more! Let
'me never forsake the way of thy com-
'mandments, nor again incur thy fatherly
'displeasure!'

Such will be the language and sentiments of the believer, under the afflicting hand of God. But sensible of the deceitfulness, and desperate wickedness of his own heart, he will likewise be disposed to add,

II. A prayer for divine teaching. *That which I see not, teach thou me.*

This is a prayer very necessary for *all*, and peculiarly seasonable in the time of affliction, since one of the principal ends for which affliction is sent is the discovery of sin, and one of the chief benefits derived from it is the knowledge of ourselves.

This prayer may be understood as refering both to the rule of our conduct, the law of God, by which we are enabled to discover the nature of sin in general; and to the application of this rule to our own particular characters and conduct.

1. It may have a reference to the rule and measure of our conduct, the holy law of God. *That which I see not*, of the purity and perfection of this consummate standard of duty, *teach thou me*. And how much need there is of divine teaching for this purpose, will be evident, if we consider what low imperfect ideas the generality of mankind entertain of the law of God; and what a poor measure of outward conformity to its precepts appears to satisfy even the most decent and respectable of

those who are strangers to the teaching of the divine Spirit. But the enlightened soul has very different views of the law of God, and of that degree of purity of heart, as well as regularity of outward conduct, which it demands; and yet, after all, deeply sensible of his ignorance in this respect, he prays that God would make him more fully acquainted with the rule of his duty, saying with the Psalmist, *Make me to understand the way of thy precepts. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law. I have seen an end of all perfection, for thy commandments are exceeding broad. Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.* But,

2. This prayer may likewise have a reference to the application of this rule to our own characters and conduct, whereby we become acquainted with our own sins in particular.

And surely, if divine teaching is necessary to make us acquainted with the rule of our conduct, it is no less necessary to ena-

ble us to make a right application of it to ourselves, for the discovery of our real characters in the sight of God. Alas! how little of this knowledge obtains among men! Many are so blinded by self-love, as to be insensible, even of their gross deviations from the law of God; and what they readily enough condemn in others, they freely allow in themselves. Nay, how many hidden, undiscerned, yea, unsuspected evils and follies lodge in the hearts of those who are least under the dominion of sin, and most accustomed to examine themselves. Well might the Psalmist ask, *Who can understand his errors?* and pray, *cleanse thou me from secret faults*—not only from those which are hidden from the view of men, but from those also which are concealed from myself.

O what a deal of vanity and love of this world; how much impurity, secret pride, and self-seeking lurk unperceived in our hearts, till God cause us to see them, leading us, as he did the prophet Ezekiel, from one thing to another, still saying, as he did

to him, *Son of man, hast thou seen these? I will shew thee yet more and greater abominations than these* *. Thus it is with many of us who ought to be the temples of the living God. We have many *images of jealousy*, one lying behind another, unperceived and unsuspected, till God is pleased to discover them to us. What need have we then, most earnestly to pray, *That which I see not, teach thou me.*

In both these respects then, in the knowledge both of the rule that God hath given us, and of our own want of conformity to it, we have need to apply for divine teaching, for who teacheth like God? He can teach us more in one hour, than men can do in a whole age; and he does what no other teacher can do, he gives to the dullest understanding a capacity to receive his instructions, making wise the simple and opening the eyes of the blind. Happy the man who is taught of God this most important knowledge of which I have now been

* Ezek. viii. 15.

speaking: for however painful and humbling the discovery of guilt and corruption, in connection with the purity and perfection of the law of God, may be, it is the groundwork of all saving knowledge. From this we derive our knowledge of sin, in its nature, deformity, and awful consequences. From this too arises our esteem of that spotless righteousness which justifies the ungodly—a righteousness every way adapted to the circumstances of our guilty, helpless condition, and fitted to give relief under the most alarming apprehensions of impending wrath. And finally, from this painful, but salutary teaching of God's Spirit, springs a settled abhorrence of all iniquity, and a determined resolution, in the strength of divine grace, to avoid it for the future. This leads me to illustrate

III. The last particular that I mentioned as contained in the text, namely, a pious resolution, founded on the foregoing confession and prayer, *If I have done iniquity, I will do no more.*

This implies a total renunciation of all sin, and a full and fixed purpose of new and better obedience. It is the natural language of every sincere penitent, 'If there is 'any iniquity that I have not yet discovered, let me now see it, that in the strength 'of thy promised grace, I may abhor and 'abandon it for ever.' There must not be any secret reserve in our dealings with God, any beloved lust that we should wish to spare, nor any partial indulgence in any thing that is inconsistent with our duty to our heavenly Father. No; wherever the grace of God is known in truth, there is an absolute renunciation of all sin, and an entire surrender of ourselves to the service of God. Without this our religion is vain; and, what is more to our present purpose, without this our afflictions are vain, for *by these the iniquity of Jacob is purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin.* Whatever sufferings therefore men may endure, they have gained nothing by them if their hearts remain as self-willed, as carnal, and as stubborn as before. But blessed is the man whom God chasteneth, and teach-

eth out of his law. Blessed is the man whose heart is humbled by affliction, and whose stubborn will is brought under a meek submission to the will of God. Blessed is the man in whom the love of sin is destroyed; and who, by means of his heavenly Father's chastisement, is made, in some happy measure, partaker of his holiness. Such a one may kiss the rod that smites him, and count his greatest sufferings among his choicest mercies; since every thing that befals us ought to be estimated, not by its outward appearance, but by the tendency it has to advance our conformity to the will and image of God, in which the chief glory and happiness of our nature consists.

Would to God, my Brethren, that there were such hearts in us, and that every one in this assembly, under the correcting hand of God, was disposed to say, as in the text, *I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more. That which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.*

Thus have I endeavoured to illustrate the passage before us, and from the particulars it contains to delineate the temper of mind becoming a child of God in the season of affliction. You will naturally judge that my mind has been led to these reflections, in consequence of the late indisposition with which an infinitely wise and gracious God hath been pleased to visit me. What might be the design of this fatherly correction with respect to myself, it concerns me only to know. But surely it is not presumption or vanity to suppose, that this dispensation of providence had some respect likewise to my beloved and affectionate Congregation, whose souls the great Lord of the vineyard hath given me in special charge. It deeply concerns your Pastor to inquire, in what instances he has failed in ministerial fidelity and watchfulness in times past, that through the strength of God, he may not so offend any more. But does it not equally concern you, my Brethren, likewise to inquire, how you have improved the gospel of Christ, though delivered to you by so unworthy an instrument, and in what instances you may

have sinned against God, either in your personal or social capacities? Most certain it is, that God may visit a congregation, as well as larger communities, with marks of his displeasure on account of some particular offences; and surely we must be altogether deaf to the voice of God's rod, if we do not consider the sickness that for some time past has raged in this parish, as an awakening call in providence to greater watchfulness and diligence. Upon this occasion, my dear Friends, an occasion which ought to call forth at least *my* warmest acknowledgments of gratitude to Almighty God, it would be unpardonable in me not to take notice of the kind concern you were pleased to shew for my recovery during the time of my distress. This I regard, not only as a proof of your affection, but, which is of more consequence, as an encouraging symptom that God may yet be graciously pleased more abundantly to succeed my poor labours among you. Should this be the case, I can truly say it would be one of the chief comforts of my life; as the little fruit that has hitherto appeared, and the open scan-

dals that have broken out amongst us have been none of the least of my trials.

Allow me to add, as I consider this day as a new introduction to my ministry, that after some little addition made to the small stock of my experience, my views of the gospel are the same now as they were formerly; and I am fully persuaded, that had it pleased God to have removed me out of the world by my late indisposition, nothing but the faith of those truths which I have endeavoured, though in great weakness, to preach to you, could have supported me in my last and departing moments. The doctrine of man's fallen, guilty, corrupted, and utterly helpless state by nature; the doctrine of salvation by grace, through the blood and Spirit of Jesus, the God who made all things; the necessity of a new nature, and of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to obtain that holiness of heart and life, without which no man shall see the Lord—these have hitherto been the chief subjects of my ministry; and whether it shall please God to lengthen out my days, or to cut

them short, still I hope to abide by the apostle's determination, *to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.* Amen.

SERMON XIV.

THE DUTY OF SEEKING THE THINGS WHICH ARE JESUS CHRIST'S *.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 21.

For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.

WE can be at no loss to understand the Apostle's meaning in the passage before us, whether we consider its connection with the context, or attend to the common use of language. A proposition may sometimes be stated in universal terms, when only a great number, or the greater part are meant.

* Preached before the Edinburgh Missionary Society, April 5. 1803.

Such a mode of expression is usual in the gravest writings, as well as in ordinary and familiar discourse.

We cannot suppose that the apostle intended, by these words, to characterise all his fellow-Christians, the whole multitude of believers; many of whom were conspicuous for a spirit and temper, the very reverse of that which the apostle here condemns. He speaks, in the context, of Timothy, as one, who, *as a son with a father, served with him in the gospel* *. And a little after, of Epaphroditus, *his brother and companion in labour, who, for the work of Christ, was nigh unto death, not regarding his life to supply their lack of service towards him* †. And, in the foregoing chapter, he tells us, that *many of the brethren, waxing confident by his bonds, were much more bold to speak the word without fear* ‡.

* Phil. ii. 22. † Chap. ii. 25, 30.
‡ Chap. i. 14.

But from this, as well as many other parts of Paul's epistolary writings, it appears, that even at this early period of the church, a selfish and worldly spirit had begun to manifest itself among those who bore the Christian name. And, in particular, we have reason to think, that the apostle had occasion to witness the prevalence of this spirit among many real, or pretended friends of Christianity, at the time when he wrote this epistle. And if such were the case in this purest age of the church, when the temptations to a false and hypocritical profession of religion were so much fewer than they are at present, is it any wonder, that, in these corrupt and degenerate times in which we live, we should have still greater cause to complain, that *all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's?*

Selfishness, or inordinate self-love, is the common character of mankind. While men are strangers to the regenerating power of divine grace, they are almost wholly guided by it. Even their boasted benevolence,

uninfluenced by the principles and motives which the gospel inspires, is little better than refined selfishness. The world they pursue as their chief good—its honours, its riches, or its pleasures, are, in their estimation, of the highest importance; so that, regardless of the glory of their Maker, and of the ultimate end of their being, they only consult the means of present selfish gratification. Nor is this temper, alas! wholly confined to those who are living without God, and without hope in the world. It is too often found, in a certain degree, in men who are, upon the whole, actuated by nobler principles. The cursed leaven has spread itself through the church of Christ, and infected the minds even of its genuine members. I do not mean to affirm, that a prevailing worldly or selfish spirit is compatible with real religion—No; let God be true, though every man should prove a liar. The tree is known by its fruits; and if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his. But as Christians are only sanctified in part, there may remain a considerable mixture of selfishness, even in

those in whose hearts the love of God is supreme. Hence have arisen the envies, jealousy, and party-spirit which have tarnished the character, and marred the usefulness of many wise and good men.

To trace the nature, and point out the causes of this criminal temper, would open up a very wide, and, perhaps, not unprofitable subject of discourse; and such a train of reflection is naturally suggested by the words of the text. But this is not my purpose at present. My design, in the choice of this text, is not so much to expose the sinfulness and mischievous consequences of a selfish and worldly spirit, in the professors of Christianity, as to recommend a temper opposite to it:—to shew the dignity, excellence, and unspeakable advantages of public spirit, and disinterested Christian zeal—that I may, if possible, rouse a generous emulation in the breasts of those, who, possessing the means and opportunities of doing good, have not been so active as they might have been, in improving the talents committed

to them. With this end in view, and looking up to God for his blessing, I shall endeavour,

I. To state and explain the principles by which true Christians are led to seek the things which are Jesus Christ's, in preference to their own. And then,

II. Recommend the cultivation and exercise of this divine temper, by some motives and arguments.

I. I am to state and explain to you, the principles by which true Christians are led to seek the things which are Jesus Christ's, in preference to their own. The things which are Jesus Christ's, are the things pertaining to the kingdom and glory of Jesus Christ, with the means of promoting them. These are opposed to our own things: that is, to our own ease, reputation, or worldly interest, which duty to God, and a regard to the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ, will often require us to sacrifice. It is not

possible indeed, to divest ourselves of a regard to our own happiness:—nor does the gospel require it. On the contrary, in the summary which Christ hath given us of the second table of the law, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, it is plainly supposed, that self-love, under due regulations, is a natural and proper principle of action, since it is the measure by which we are to regulate the love which we owe to our neighbour. Pious men have sometimes uttered rash and unscriptural sentiments upon this subject, supposing it possible to be so far divested of all selfish regards, as to be willing to be eternally miserable, if the glory of God, and the good of others might be thereby promoted; and have, in support of this opinion, cited Moses and Paul as examples of this high degree of disinterested zeal and charity. But this sentiment is as opposite to the whole tenor of scripture doctrine, as it is repugnant to the common feelings of mankind. Nor do the examples that have been mentioned, when properly understood, give the smallest countenance to this

idea*. The glory of God is certainly the highest and noblest end at which a creature can aim, since it is the great end for which all things were made.—but this, so far from

* In Exod. xxxii. 31, 32. we are told, upon occasion of the Israelites making the golden calf, that "Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, O! this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold: Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin, and if not, *blot me out of thy book which thou hast written.*" There is no reason to suppose, that Moses, in these words, refers to his final state, or expresses his willingness to endure everlasting misery for the sake of the people of Israel; but God having threatened, (ver. 10.) the total extirpation of the people whom he had brought out of Egypt, and offered to Moses to make of him a great nation;—Moses cannot bear the thought of this; but humbly pleads with God, that he would spare the people for his name's sake; or, if that could not be, but they must be cut off, that *he*, at least, might not survive to witness their destruction, but be cut off with them, by a violent death; and, consequently, have no inheritance in the land of Canaan. Compare Ezekiel xiii. 9. In short, Moses, though innocent of the crime which, upon this occasion, had provoked the Lord's displeasure, was willing to endure any kind or degree of suffering short of eternal misery, for the sake of the guilty congregation; in which, as in other respects, he was an eminent type of our Lord Jesus Christ, who not only ex-

being incompatible, is inseparably connected with the happiness of all the dutiful subjects of God's moral government, and it never can be for his glory that any creature

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pressed his willingness to suffer, but actually bore the curse due to our transgression, that he might redeem us from everlasting destruction.

The parallel passage relating to the apostle Paul, from which some have inferred, that he, as well as Moses, was willing to forego his own eternal happiness for the sake of others, is Rom. ix. 3. "For I could wish that myself "were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kins-"men according to the flesh." Many different interpretations have been given of this difficult passage, without supposing it to refer to the apostle's final and everlasting state. The most probable appears to me to be the following, which Mr Glass in his Notes on Scripture texts, and others after him have adopted. The Greek word ηυχόμην, rendered in our translation "I "*could* wish," properly refers to the past, and not to the present time. It might be rendered "I *did* wish," which relieves the passage of the principal difficulty attending it. Placing a part of it in a parenthesis, the whole text, ver. 2. and 3. runs thus: "I have great heaviness, and "continual sorrow in my heart, (for I myself [ηυχόμην] "*did* wish to be accursed, or separated from Christ) on "account of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the "flesh." Paul's *former* hatred of Christ, and a convic-

should be eternally miserable, who does not for his own wilful rebellion and impenitence deserve to be so. The self-denial which the gospel requires, implies nothing of this kind. But still it occupies a very wide and extensive province; and they who are possessed of the genuine spirit of Christianity, will discover, in their general temper and conduct, a superiority to those selfish views which actuate the rest of mankind. Let us attend, then, to the principles upon which such a character is formed, contrasting the selfishness of a worldling, or mere formalist in religion, with the enlarged and disinterested benevolence of a faithful disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The grand principle upon which the Christian character is formed, and that which gives birth to every other gracious disposition, is *faith*. Faith, as the apostle

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tion of the misery to which he was then exposed, made him *now* feel in the tenderest manner for his brethren the Jews, who still remained in the same enmity from which he had been so miraculously delivered.

tells us, is *the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen* *. It gives a kind of present subsistence to things future and invisible; representing them to the mind, not as bare probabilities, but as absolute certainties, to which we may attach the firmest credit, and on which we may rely with the most unsuspicious confidence. Faith has respect to the testimony of God, as the ground upon which it rests. It embraces the whole system of revealed truth, and yields an implicit and unqualified assent to every thing which bears the undoubted mark of divine authority. The faith of a Christian does not indeed require him to believe without evidence; for the sacred scriptures, which contain the revelation of God's will, are accompanied with many infallible proofs of their divine original. But when satisfied upon clear and convincing evidence, that the scriptures are the word of God, the Christian does not consider himself at liberty to choose or to refuse certain parts of the divine testimony,

* Heb. xi. 1.

according as they may appear to him to be more or less conformable to his corrupt prejudices, or sinful inclinations. He considers himself equally bound by every word which God hath spoken, and cordially acquiesces in all his revealed will, as holy, and just, and good.

Such is the faith of divine operation, the faith which is inseparably connected with salvation. But it is too evident, that *all men have not this faith* *. Many openly oppose and deride it, while others, who esteem themselves, and would be esteemed by others, Christians, are satisfied with a cold formal assent to the truth of divine revelation in general, without understanding its nature, examining its contents, or feeling any particular interest in the doctrines which it reveals. The consequence is, that with all their pretended veneration for the sacred scriptures, they receive no serious lasting impression from them, nor do they at all experience their practical influence.

* 2 Thess. iii. 2.

Naming the name of Christ they depart not from iniquity, but walk after the course of this world, and mind only earthly things. Hence it is, that so many professors of Christianity, especially in the age in which we live, when a mere outward profession of religion is attended with little danger to a man's worldly interest, seek their own things in preference to the things which are Jesus Christ's. It is far otherwise with the man who is possessed of genuine faith in the gospel. Inspired with this divine principle, the true Christian is taught to form a proper estimate of the unspeakable value of spiritual blessings, and the comparative insignificance of all earthly pursuits, *while he looks not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at those things which are unseen and eternal* *. *Risen with Christ, he seeks and sets his affections on things above, not on things on the earth* †. According to the measure of his faith is his superiority to low earthly schemes and selfish considerations. These, it is true, may mingle

* 2 Cor. iv. 8. † Col. iii. 1, 2.

with his religious duties, and debase his purest services, which cannot fail to humble him deeply in the sight of God; but they do not form his predominant character: they arise from the weakness of his faith, and are neither allowed nor indulged, but powerfully resisted and mourned over before the Lord. With all his acknowledged imperfection, an habitual regard to the things which are Jesus Christ's, in preference to his own things, is abundantly manifest in the prevailing temper of his mind, as well as in the general tenor of his conduct.

In nothing, perhaps, is true spiritual religion (the religion, I mean, which flows from a living faith in the gospel,) more distinguished from a form of godliness than in this respect. The stream can rise no higher than the fountain from which it flows. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; but that which is born of the spirit is spirit* *. A worldly man's religion is regu-

* John iii. 6.

lated by worldly principles; *his fear of God is taught by the precepts of men* *. A stranger to the faith which overcometh the world, not realising the things of an unseen and everlasting state, he is always afraid of venturing too far; of being righteous overmuch; of hurting his worldly interest, and incurring the censure and reproach of those whose good opinion he wishes to preserve. But the simple-hearted genuine disciple of Christ, has learned to deny himself, to take up his cross, and follow his blessed Lord. He has counted the cost, and is made willing to *sell all that he has, that he may buy the treasure hid in the gospel field—the pearl of great price* †, which faith has taught him to prize above every thing which this world can bestow.

2. Connected with this principle, and naturally flowing from it, is another gracious disposition, which has a powerful influence in forming the Christian character—*a supreme love to the Lord Jesus Christ.*

* Isa. xxix. 13 † Matt. xiii. 45, 46.

No temper or disposition of mind is more frequently spoken of in scripture, as characteristic of a real Christian, than love to Christ. It is of the very nature and essence of true religion. *If any man*, says the apostle, *love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha* *; but, on the other hand, *Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity* †. Love to Christ, proceeding from faith in him, is something more than a transient glow of affection. It is something more than *saying unto Christ, Lord, Lord,* which many do, who in works deny him. Genuine love to Christ is a powerful, operative, abiding principle. It is the spring of all acceptable obedience, the grand incentive to the practice of every thing that is *true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report* ‡; *for the love of Christ* CONSTRAINETH *us* ‖: it impels us forward, and bears us on in its own course, like a mighty current which carries

* 1 Cor. xvi. 22. † Eph. vi. 24.

‡ Phil. iv. 8. ‖ συνέχει ἡμᾶς.

all before it. But how is this gracious principle brought into action, or in what way is its existence in the soul manifested in the outward conduct? Our Lord Jesus Christ is not now personally present upon earth, to receive from his friends any visible tokens of regard. The heavens have received him till the time of the restitution of all things. But he has a cause, a kingdom, an interest in the world, and what is done for the advancement of his kingdom and interest among men, out of love to his name, he considers as done to himself. Here, then, Brethren, is the test of the sincerity of our love to Christ—a test which he himself requires as indispensably necessary to the character of his disciples *. *He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.* And again, in still stronger terms †, *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, and his*

* Matt. x. 37. † Luke xiv. 26.

own life also, he cannot be my disciple. The meaning of both these passages is the same. They evidently refer to the supreme affection of the soul, and to that decided preference which the things of Jesus Christ ought to have in our minds above our own things. Our Lord, in the words just now recited, cannot be supposed to require us absolutely to hate our brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh, (for this would be as contrary to the plainest principles of religion, as to the common dictates of humanity,) but, in a comparative view, we are commanded to act as if we hated them, so as to be willing to renounce our dearest friends, when duty to Christ demands such a sacrifice;—that is, when we must either forsake them, or forsake our blessed Lord.

This doctrine, which appears to many an hard saying, is strikingly illustrated by an apposite example, which occurs in the history of our Saviour's personal ministry *. We read of a certain Ruler, who came to

* Luke xviii. 18—23.

Christ, professing great respect for his character, and an earnest desire to be instructed by him. *Good Master*, said he, *what shall I do to inherit eternal life?* Our Lord, who knew what was in man, perceived, that, with all his professions of regard, the love of the world was predominant in his heart, and therefore he put his boasted virtue to the trial, by telling him, *Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me.* The event was such as might have been expected, in the case of one whose heart was not right with God. *He went away very sorrowful, for he was very rich.* For the same reason, one of Paul's fellow-labourers deserted him in the hour of trial. *Demas hath forsaken me*, says he, *having loved this present world**." And many, alas! in every age, who are called by the name of Christ, and with their mouths shew much love, plainly discover by their conduct, that the world has the chief place

* 2 Tim. iv. 10.

in their hearts; preferring their own ease, credit, and interest, to the honour of Christ and the advancement of his kingdom, whenever they happen to come in competition with each other. The genuine disciples of Christ, who are possessed of a supreme love to him, are men of another spirit. To them, the honour of Christ, and the advancement of his kingdom, are matters of the most serious concern. They rejoice in Zion's prosperity, and are filled with the deepest regret, when the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom appears to be in a low and declining state. Nor are they satisfied with indolent wishes and unmeaning compliments, when they have it in their power to give more substantial proofs of regard to the Saviour; but constrained by his love, present their bodies and spirits as living sacrifices, and cheerfully consecrate their time, and talents, and substance, and influence to his service and glory.

3. Another principle, arising from the two former, which has a powerful influence in forming the Christian character, is, *love*

to the souls of men, or true Christian benevolence.

The origin of this divine temper is to be traced to the love of God, displayed in the redemption of the world by his Son Jesus Christ. For, as the apostle John informs us, *Love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren* *." The character of man as a fallen apostate creature, is the very reverse of this—*Hateful, and hating one another* †, exhibits a no less just than melancholy picture of his history in all past ages, with but few exceptions. Nor is this difficult to be accounted for. While every one pursues his own apparent interest, without regard to the welfare or happiness of others, various will be the occasions of mutual strife and contention. Pride and covetousness, these two evil demons which haunt the

* 1 John iv. 7. and iii. 16. † Tit. iii. 3.

smaller, as well as the larger societies of men, have produced innumerable mischiefs in the world. Hence have arisen wars and fightings, discord and jealousy, peevishness and discontent, which, in ten thousand instances, have broken the peace of nations, of churches, and families. There is, I acknowledge, a sort of benevolence, which, greatly for the benefit of society, is to be found among those who are strangers to the saving power of the gospel; though, even on persons of this description, Christianity has no inconsiderable influence. In proof of this, it may be observed, that a spirit of humanity and liberality is chiefly to be found in those places where the purest system of religion prevails, and where the greatest number of real Christians are to be seen adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour. Their influence and example cannot fail to stir up others to acts of beneficence, and to diffuse a spirit of general philanthropy, which gradually and insensibly raising the standard of morals, contributes, in a high degree, to meliorate and improve the state of society. But however

useful this sort of benevolence may be in its own place, it falls short of that love to mankind, which is the fruit of a living faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The common benevolence which springs from mere natural principles, refers chiefly to men's bodily wants, and temporal distresses; whereas true Christian love, while it does not overlook these, aims at higher objects, and, deeply sensible how infinitely superior the concerns of the soul are to those things which relate only to a present life, directs its principal efforts to the spiritual interests and eternal salvation of mankind.

While the Christian philanthropist, then, mourns over the countless calamities of suffering humanity, he is still more deeply affected with the spiritual distresses of his fellow-creatures. While his heart bleeds at every tale of woe, his compassion is roused in a still higher degree, by beholding the ignorance and wickedness of multitudes around him. While he labours to the utmost of his power to relieve the wants, and alleviate the miseries of the poor and afflicted,

he is no less active and zealous in promoting every scheme for spreading the light and blessings of the gospel, especially in *those dark places of the earth*, which, in the emphatical language of scripture, are *full of the habitations of cruelty* *.

The gospel, when properly understood and believed, cannot fail to produce these effects, being admirably fitted to enlarge and elevate the mind, and to destroy that sordid selfishness which is so universally prevalent in the world. It teaches us to consider every man as our brother. It breaks down the middle wall of partition *between Jew and Gentile, Barbarian, Scythian, bond, and free* †. It disposes us to regard, with interest and affection, the African Negro, the American Indian, the wandering Tartar, the South Sea Islander, the half-starved Greenlander—the untutored savage of every clime, as well as the inhabitant of more favoured regions. It shews that, in point of acceptance with God, all

* Psal. lxxiv. 20. † Coloss. iii. 11.

men, notwithstanding the distinctions of country, climate, colour, and even character, stand upon a footing;—that all are sprung from the same stock—descended from the same apostate parents—involved in the same circumstances of guilt and misery—indebted for their hope to the common salvation—and equally capable subjects of redeeming power and grace. By holding up to our view the great pattern of divine benevolence, exhibited in the gift of God's own Son, the gospel has a tendency to inspire universal good-will—to expand the soul with the most enlarged and generous sentiments—and to beget and cherish, in particular, an ardent love to the souls of men, as of unspeakable value, being destined for immortality, and redeemed by the blood of the Son of God. The great rule of Christian charity is expressed in these Scriptural exhortations: *Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether*

we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's *.

These, then, are the *principles* which contribute to form in the Christian that pure and disinterested zeal for the glory of the Redeemer, and the advancement of his kingdom, which constitutes the brightest ornament of his character. Faith, working by love, is the true spring of all that is great, or amiable, or excellent among men.

Suffer me now, my Christian Brethren,

II. By a few plain motives and arguments, to recommend to you the cultivation and exercise of this divine temper.

1. The superior importance of the things of Jesus Christ to our own things, should determine our preference.

* Phil. ii. 4. Rom. xii. 15. and xiv. 7, 8.

How poor and trifling, in comparison, are all those objects which so much engross the time and attention of the great bulk of mankind! What a bauble is wealth, compared with the unsearchable riches of Christ! How insignificant the honour that cometh from man, compared with the honour that cometh from God! And how contemptible the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season—those short-lived enjoyments for which men barter their souls and eternal salvation, when set in competition with the high dignity and happiness of being workers together with God, in promoting the holy, wise, and beneficent purposes of his government! The things which are Jesus Christ's, remember, are the things which pertain to the divine glory. *For the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand**. And can we conceive, Christians, a higher motive to exertion than the glory of Him that made us? Has the Father committed to the Son the dearest interests of his own glory, and shall we not seek the things

* John iii. 35.

which are Jesus Christ's, in preference to every thing else? Our own things!—How do they dwindle into insignificance when contrasted with these! Shall we prefer a little ease, a little worldly interest or indulgence, a little praise or commendation from poor fellow-mortals like ourselves (for these are the only things which can come into competition with the things which are Jesus Christ's) to the glory of God, and the honour of the Redeemer?

Take the things which are supposed to be of the greatest importance to mankind—the rise and fall of empires—the revolutions of states and kingdoms—the civil and political interests of the great bodies which divide the inhabitants of the globe. These, it will readily be granted, are justly entitled to regard, since they involve the temporal comfort and prosperity of thousands and millions of our fellow-creatures. But bring them into competition with the things which are Jesus Christ's, and what is their amount? Except in so far as they are connected with the advancement of the Re-

deemer's kingdom, *of the increase and peace of which there shall be no end* *, they will be found, comparatively speaking, light as a feather, and insignificant as the small dust upon the balance. The salvation of a single soul is an event of greater importance than the conquest of a kingdom. The humble self-denied followers of the Lamb, who are willing to hazard their lives for the sake of Christ and immortal souls, are far more worthy of being enrolled in the annals of fame—I will not say, than the Cæsars and Alexanders, who have deluged the world with blood, whose memory is fitted to excite abhorrence, rather than applause—but than the most renowned patriots, or illustrious benefactors of the human race, who have promoted, in the highest degree, the temporal interests of their fellow-creatures. Little as the preaching of the gospel, and the effects produced by it, are regarded by many, it is followed with consequences infinitely more momentous than those which arise from the deliberations of senates, or

* Isa. ix. 7.

the decrees of princes. And are Christians, then, the only men who are justified in the indulgence of sloth? Are all others active and diligent in promoting, in different ways, what they conceive to be their interest, while they who call themselves disciples of Christ, are careless and indifferent about the honour of their Master, and the success of his glorious gospel!—How true the saying of our blessed Lord, *The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light* !* The merchant, in quest of gain, braves the dangers of the deep, and exposes himself to all the variety of climates; the scholar, who aspires after literary fame, grudges no time, and spares no labour that may add to the stock of his knowledge; and the crafty politician, who seeks to rise into power, by the favour and good services of those around him, thinks no condescension too great which may lead to the accomplishment of his wishes. Let us blush for shame, that we, who profess to have such superior

* Luke xvi. 8.

objects in view, should be so far outstripped in activity and zeal by the votaries of Mammon, who aim at nothing higher than the attainment of blessings which perish with the using.

2. Gratitude to the Redeemer for the inestimable benefits he hath procured for us, should excite us to seek the things which are Jesus Christ's in preference to our own. *Even Christ*, we are told, *pleased not himself* *. He sought not his own things, but the glory of his heavenly Father, and the happiness of his people. *He became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich* †: he emptied himself of his glory, though possessed of all the fulness of the Godhead, took upon him the degraded form of a servant, submitted to shame and sufferings, and death itself, that he might deliver us from endless inconceivable misery, and raise us to the possession of immortal glory and blessedness. In this view, how astonishing is the history of Christ's person-

* Rom. xv. 3. † 2 Cor. viii. 9.

al ministry! Well might it be said of him, that *the zeal of God's house had eaten him up* *; for *it was his meat and drink to do the will of his heavenly Father, and to finish his work* †. Often did he deny himself the ordinary refreshments of nature, that he might be serviceable to the souls of men. Upon one occasion, when faint and weary, he sat on Jacob's well, and asked of the woman of Samaria a little water to quench his thirst; denied, as he was at first, this trifling boon, he seems, from the conversation that follows, to have forgotten his thirst in his ardent concern for the salvation of this poor woman's soul ‡. And once and again, we read of his retiring to a mountain to pray, and spending whole nights in prayer, after having employed the day in public instruction and acts of beneficence ‖.

What a pattern to his followers! And how powerful a motive likewise to deny ourselves

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* John ii. 17. † John iv. 34.

‡ John iv. 9—26. ‖ Mark vi. 40. Luke vi. 12.

for him, who, for our sakes, laboured, and watched, and wept, and prayed, and at last shed his precious blood! How poor the returns which we can possibly make for his marvellous love to us! But surely, if one spark of gratitude remain in our breasts, we cannot fail to judge with the apostle, *that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that Christ died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but to him who died for them and rose again* *. We must be irresistibly led, by this endearing consideration, to seek the things which are Jesus Christ's, accounting the honour of his name, and the advancement of his kingdom in the world, of infinitely greater moment, and far more desirable than any little separate interest of our own. *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem*, said the captive Jews in Babylon, *let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy* †. In like man-

* 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. † Psal. cxxxvii. 5, 6.

will the pious Christian say, 'If ever I forget thy dying love, O bleeding Immanuel! if ever I lose the sense of my infinite obligations to thy matchless grace, let my right hand forget her cunning, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth. Sooner let me die than not live to thee; sooner let me lose the powers of my rational nature, than fail to employ them in thy service. Henceforth thy glory shall be my constant aim, thy will my only rule, and the advancement of thy kingdom, in the particular station in which thy providence hath placed me, the great business of my life.'

Cherish, my Christian Friends, such sentiments as these. Muse upon the great things which God hath done for your souls, till the fire of divine love burn within you, and you feel yourselves constrained to say, *Lord, what wilt thou have us to do* *—to be—or to suffer? We are ready, through thine all-powerful grace assisting us, *not*

* Acts ix. 6.

to be bound only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus *. We are ready to renounce kindred, country, friends, comforts,—every thing, in short, which the world holds dear, at the command of him whose we are, and to whom we owe our everlasting all. Only let the grace of Christ be sufficient, and his strength made perfect in our weakness, and love will make pain easy, and labour delightful.

3. To animate us to the exercise of pure and disinterested zeal, let us recal to our minds the example of the best and holiest men who have lived in past ages.

All seek their own, says the apostle, *not the things which are Jesus Christ's*—and too much cause has there been for the same complaint in every period of the church. But, blessed be God, there have been, and still are, many noble examples of the contrary spirit. The Lord has not wanted faithful witnesses to his truth, from the ear-

* Acts xxi. 13.

liest ages of the world, through all succeeding generations, to the present times. Moses, the renowned lawgiver of the Jews, was a man on whom the Spirit of God rested in no common measure; and for no quality was this eminent servant of God more distinguished, than for a noble superiority to narrow and selfish views. Among many proofs of this that might be mentioned, it is recorded of him upon one occasion *, that *when Eldad and Medad, two men who were of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle, prophesied in the camp;* Joshua, the servant of Moses, offended at their presumption, proposed that they should not be allowed to prophecy any longer. *My lord Moses*, said he, *forbid them*. But Moses, better instructed in the spirit of true religion, nobly replied, *Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them.* In the same temper John the Baptist, the forerunner of our blessed Lord, spoke and acted, when

* Numb. xi. 26—29.

some of his disciples came to him, telling him, by way of complaint, *Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness; behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.* Greatly superior to all their little jealousies, John answered and said, *A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy, therefore, is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease* *.

But in none was this blessed temper ever more conspicuous, than in Paul himself, the apostle whose words we are now considering. How ardent and disinterested was the zeal of this great apostle, for the honour of his Master! From the time that his Lord

* John iii. 25—30.

met him on his way to Damascus, to the close of his life, a period of more than thirty years, his whole soul was engaged in devising and carrying into execution schemes for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom. Nor did he seem to 'think he had 'done any thing, while any thing remain-'ed to be done *,' in this glorious warfare. He spoke—he lived—he acted—he breathed for no other purpose. Sometimes the apostle met with ungrateful returns from those whose best interests he laboured to promote; but even ingratitude itself could not damp the generous ardour of his love. Speaking to the Corinthians, he says, *I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I should be loved* †. And to shew how far this great man was superior to those narrow selfish views which operate so strongly upon little minds, he informs us in this epistle ‡, that some preachers of the gospel

* Nil actum reputans, si quid superesset agendum. LUCAN.

† 2 Cor. xii. 15. ‡ Phil. i. 15—18.

had so far departed from the true spirit of their office, as *to preach Christ even of envy and strife, supposing to add affliction to his bonds.* The apostle does not commend their spiteful spirit; but in so far as he himself was concerned, he shews that he was not in the least affected by it. *What then,* continues he, *notwithstanding every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.* In the prosecution of this arduous work, the apostle was sometimes exposed to incredible dangers and hardships. But none of these things moved him, neither did he count his life dear to himself, that he might finish his course with joy. *Yea,* says he, a few verses before the text *, *and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all.*

In these examples, brethren, we see the power of genuine magnanimity—we behold the effects of the grace of God upon men

* Phil. ii. 17.

of the same nature, and of like passions with ourselves; and by these and similar examples, we ought to be excited and encouraged in the strength of God, to aim at the same excellence and dignity of character.

In the *Fourth* and last place, Let a regard to our own best and eternal interests determine us to seek the things which are Jesus Christ's in preference to our own. This, at first view, may appear paradoxical, that we should be exhorted to consult our own interest by seeming to overlook and neglect it. But this difficulty vanishes at once, if we recollect, that the highest interest of man is the salvation of his immortal soul, which forms a part of the things which are Jesus Christ's; and that even with regard to our temporal interest, *if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all other things*, which are truly good and necessary for us, *will be added unto us* *. This seems to be the import of our Lord's gracious promise †, *Verily, I*

* Matt. vi. 33. † Luke xviii. 29, 30.

say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come, life everlasting.

If we simply follow the Lord in the path of duty, devoting our time and talents to his service and glory, and minding the interest of his kingdom above every other concern, the power and promise of God are engaged for our temporal support *. We may be brought into difficult and trying circumstances—former friends may frown, or forsake us—adverse dispensations of providence may add to our perplexity and distress—the cruise of oil, and barrel of meal may be nearly exhausted, and the means of future supply may seem to be cut off;—but they that fear the Lord shall not lack any

* It is remarkable, that God secured the possessions of the Israelites when their males came up to Jerusalem to worship three times a-year, and promised that the heathen should not so much as desire their land at those times, Exod. xxxiv. 24. Compare Prov. xvi. 7.

thing that is good. Sooner will the Lord open windows in heaven than suffer any of his children to be utterly forsaken. *Their bread shall be given, and their water shall be sure* *. And though, for the sake of Christ and a good conscience, they may be sometimes called to abandon the dearest earthly comforts—to take, not only the spoiling of their goods, but what is much harder to bear, the loss of their good name;—though they may be hated, reviled, and persecuted for Christ's sake—yet the Lord, who has the hearts of all in his hands, can, in ten thousand ways, restrain the wrath of their enemies; or, if he allow it in any measure to break forth, he can, by his wonder-working wisdom, render it subservient to their greater good. In every case, and at all events, *it shall be well with the righteous* †. *They shall receive manifold more in the present time*—a well-grounded sense of the divine favour,—peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ—fellowship with him in the ordinances of his

* Isa. xxxiii. 16. † Isa. iii. 10.

grace—the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—the testimony of an approving conscience—and the joyful reviving hope of heaven. These are sufficient to compensate the loss of all earthly comforts, and to preserve the soul steady and serene amidst the raging billows of adversity. If God be for us, who can be against us? If the Almighty be our friend, our protector, and our guide, what have we to fear from the malice of men, or the rage of devils? In foreign lands and distant climes, as well as when surrounded with our families and friends, our compassionate Saviour will be near to comfort us. His presence can cheer the gloom of solitude, remove the apprehension of danger, strengthen under the severest suffering, and overcome the dread of dying.

And no sooner shall our connection with things seen and temporal be dissolved, than we shall find *in the world to come, life everlasting.* Them that honour Christ, he will honour. Our seeming losses for his sake will then be found to be unutterable gain. *They that be wise shall shine as the*

brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever *. Even a cup of cold water given to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, shall in no wise lose its reward †. Our gracious Redeemer will not forget our work of faith and labour of love. His own infinite merit, it is true, will appear in that day to be the only ground of his people's title to the heavenly inheritance; but the works which have been performed under the influence of his blessed Spirit, he will acknowledge and reward, not, indeed, as the cause of *his* love to them, but as the evidence of *their* love to him. The meanest and most despised of his humble followers he will welcome into his blissful presence with these transporting words, *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord* ‡.

Animated by these glorious hopes, Beloved, *seek not great things for yourselves,*

* Dan: xii. 3. † Matth. x. 42.

‡ Matt. xxv. 21.

but seek the things which are Jesus Christ's. Be diligent, that ye be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless at his coming. Occupy your talents till your Lord come. Be stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord: forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord *.

Such, then, are the encouraging *motives* which ought to determine us to cultivate and exercise that noble and disinterested zeal, the nature and principles of which I have endeavoured to explain. The application of this subject to the occasion of our present meeting, is abundantly obvious. In seeking the things which are Jesus Christ's, it is impossible to avoid turning our thoughts to the miserable condition of a great portion of the human race, who are *sitting in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death*; wretched slaves of the most abject superstition, and sunk in the most de-

* Jer. xlv. 5. 2 Pet. iii. 14. Luke xix. 13. 1 Cor. xv. 58.

grading vices. A benevolent mind cannot view this object with indifference. A Christian heart cannot think of it without the tenderest pity. The gospel is evidently fitted and designed to become a universal blessing. It has nothing in its nature local or limited. But its progress and extension have hitherto been lamentably retarded, not by the malice and wickedness of its open foes, but by the criminal sloth and negligence of its professed friends, by the almost universal prevalence of the spirit which the apostle here condemns, of *seeking our own things, in preference to the things which are Jesus Christ's.*

Brethren, are we verily guiltless in this matter? If we except the Moravians, who have for many years patiently laboured in the field of Missions, and some particular exertions made by respectable and long-established societies in England, and in our own country, have not all denominations of Christians among us been shamefully deficient in employing the means which providence hath put into our hands, of spread-

ing the gospel throughout the world? Instead of hastening with generous emulation, to the aid of the heathen, we have gone, one to his farm, and another to his merchandise; or we have wasted our zeal in bitter contentions about the modes and forms of religion, while our poor fellow-sinners have been passing into the eternal world by hundreds and thousands, without one effort made to save them. Blessed be God, a more excellent spirit hath of late appeared in the Christian world.—May it continue and increase still more and more! The friends of the Redeemer, of different denominations, pitying the condition of the millions around them, who are perishing for lack of knowledge, have either among themselves, or in conjunction with other Christians, formed associations for the purpose of sending the gospel to the heathen; and though partial failures and discouragements have attended their pious efforts, in no instance have they proved altogether unsuccessful. On the contrary, the dispensations of God's providence have, in many cases, wonderfully concurred with his faithful pro-

mises, to animate the zeal, and stimulate the patient persevering endeavours of those who, out of love to Christ and perishing souls, have engaged in this noble cause. The Society, in whose name I now address you, has no separate interest in view. It most cordially co-operates with every society, and every individual that holds the great essentials of Christianity, and desires to promote the salvation of the heathen. It seeks the advancement of no sect or party, but the common interest of the Redeemer's kingdom. It apprehends no danger from any interference with those who are labouring in the same cause, for here there is employment for thousands and ten thousands more, could so many be found willing and qualified to engage in so glorious a service. *The harvest indeed is great*, for *the field is the world* *.

With confidence, therefore, I solicit your countenance and aid on this occasion. If you are seeking the things which are Jesus

* Matt. xiii. 38.

Christ's—if you are anxious to know how you may contribute to the success of the gospel, and the honour of Jesus' name, embrace the opportunity which is now afforded you, of promoting these objects. *Devise liberal things. Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase* *. Many of you know, that a favourable opening for the spread of the gospel, has lately occurred in a distant part of the Russian empire, whither two Missionaries, sent out by this society, have gone, in whose ability and zeal we have reason to place the most entire confidence. The Lord has hitherto smiled upon this undertaking. By means of the unexpected friendship of a Russian Nobleman, in a high official department, our Missionaries have obtained, not only the protection, but the favour of the Russian government. For this singular blessing, which, under God, cannot fail greatly to facilitate the object of our wishes, let our thanks this day ascend to the Father of mercies, who hath thus far

* Isa. xxxii. 8. Prov. iii. 9.

exceeded our most sanguine hopes. But in such a situation, the labours of one or two missionaries are not sufficient. The place is centrical. The state of the surrounding countries, in a moral and religious view, is deplorably wretched. Their misery strongly solicits our aid,—it cries, even from that distant region, *Come over and help us* *. And, for your encouragement, my Friends, and to excite your thankfulness, I have the satisfaction to inform you, that some have been found ready to obey the call, provided you will furnish them with the means of carrying their benevolent purpose into execution. And is there a lover of Christ in this assembly, who does not burn with the desire of lending his aid to this good work? How small a sacrifice is it to part with a little of your superfluous wealth—nay, to deny yourselves in some lawful indulgence for the sake of Christ, and the eternal salvation of your perishing fellow-creatures. Shew, then, the ardour of your love, by the cheerfulness with which you give on this occasion *according as God hath prospered you* †.

* Acts xvi. 9. † 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

And let your prayers, as well as alms ascend for a memorial before God. Pray for the extension of the Mediator's kingdom.—Pray for a blessing on the means employed for that purpose.—Pray for the ministers of the everlasting gospel, in every part of the world, and that *the great Lord of the harvest would be pleased, from time to time, to send faithful labourers into his harvest**. *Finally, Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified* †, *that a great door, and effectual, may be opened,* for the preaching of the gospel in every land ‡, *that men may be blessed in Christ, and all nations call Him blessed* ‖.——*Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen* §.

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* Matth. ix. 38. † 2 Thess. iii. 1.
‡ 1 Cor. xvi. 9. ‖ Psal. lxxii. 17.
§ Psal. lxxii. 18, 19.

SERMON XV.

SUPPORT IN GOD'S COVENANT.

2 SAMUEL xxiii. 5.

Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.

WE are naturally disposed to be more than ordinarily attentive to the words of dying persons, of those, especially, whose lives have been remarkable for piety and usefulness. Every expression that drops from their lips in these solemn circumstances, is watched with peculiar care, and the solem-

nity of the occasion gives dignity and weight to all that they say. Here, then, we have the dying testimony of an eminent saint, to the reality and comfort of true religion; the testimony of one who had passed through various scenes, and had experienced singular vicissitudes in his lot, who had seen the world in very different aspects, having been uncommonly elevated, and depressed by turns.

David had been much exercised in the school of adversity. Before his advancement to the throne, he endured a long and severe persecution from Saul, his blood-thirsty and implacable enemy. But the latter part of his life was attended with troubles still more insupportable than any he had formerly experienced. After his lamentable fall, the bitter remembrance of which seems never to have left him, what a scene of calamity does the history of David present! How rapidly does one affliction succeed another, threatening to overwhelm his soul! The defilement of Tamar—the wickedness and murder of Amnon—the re-

bellion and death of Absalom—and the treason of Adonijah, were trials peculiar in their nature, and that could not fail greatly to embitter the old age of this venerable servant of God.

Behold then, David, at the close of a busy life, bowed down with years and infirmities, oppressed with heavy and complicated troubles, yet encouraging himself in the Lord his God, rising superior to the afflictions of life, and deriving from the covenant of his God the strongest consolation. *Although my house be not so with God*—though there are many circumstances in my family, which are matter of vexation and trouble to me at this moment; though my children have proved neither so pious nor so prosperous as I could have wished, yet here is my comfort, *God hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.*

My Brethren, David's case is not singular: *Many are the afflictions of the righ-*

teous. The heart knoweth its own bitterness. Personal and domestic troubles, in a greater or less degree, are the common lot of man. There are none who have lived for any time in the world, who have not drunk of the cup of sorrow. Happy are they who have the covenant of God to support them. This is a never-failing source of consolation; a balm for the afflicted soul, suited to every possible case; an anchor of hope, sufficient to keep the mind steady and serene, amidst the raging billows of adversity.

In this discourse, I propose,

I. Shortly to explain the nature and foundation of the covenant which God makes with his people.

II. To consider the properties of this covenant, that are mentioned in the text. It is *everlasting, ordered in all things, and sure.* And,

III. To point out the comfort which an interest in this covenant is suited

to impart, under every kind and degree of trouble, particularly in the near and immediate prospect of death and eternity. *It is all my salvation*, said David, *and all my desire*.

I. Let us attend to the nature and foundation of the covenant which God makes with his people.

The covenant, of which David speaks in the text, can be no other than the covenant of grace—that dispensation of it, I mean, under which David lived, and which directed his hopes and wishes to nobler objects than any that this world could bestow. No other covenant but this partakes of the properties that are here mentioned: nor could David have rejoiced in it as all his salvation and all his desire, had not Christ been the substance of it, who is *the desire of all nations*, and *God's salvation to the ends of the earth*.

For explaining this part of the subject, it is necessary to observe, that the gospel, or

the covenant of grace (for the terms are equivalent) was revealed to man, as soon as he became a fallen guilty creature. At the very same time that God denounced the doom of our first parents, he disclosed the means of their recovery, in the gracious promise of the seed of the woman that should bruise the serpent's head. This was the first great promise on which the believers, in the antediluvian world, rested their hopes of salvation. Afterwards, the gospel was still more clearly preached to Abraham, when God was pleased to enter into covenant with him, and to promise, that in him, even in his seed, all the nations of the earth should be blessed. This is the promise made to Abraham, of which the apostle speaks; by believing in which, Abraham became the Father of the faithful, and heir of the righteousness which is by faith. This covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law (which was four hundred and thirty years after,) could not disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. David, therefore, who lived under the Mosaic, or legal dispensation,

looked for the mercy of God in the same way with faithful Abraham; for *he also describeth the blessedness of the man to whom God imputeth righteousness without works; saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*

There are not different methods of salvation, for persons who have lived in different places and periods of the world: But the same method of salvation has been exhibited from the beginning, under different appearances. The same grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. It was not a different covenant under which David and Paul lived, and on which they built their hopes of eternal salvation, but a different dispensation of the same covenant. The one looked forward to a promised Messiah, and a salvation which was to be accomplished in the fulness of time; the other believed in a Saviour who had actually come in the flesh, and in a salvation already wrought out by

his obedience unto death. David, as well as Abraham, saw the day of Christ afar off, and was glad. Through the veil of types and shadows, they beheld the promised seed, and rejoiced in that great atonement which He was to make, in the end of the world, for the sins of his people.

This is the covenant to which David looked for comfort in the midst of his trouble. It has its foundation in that grand mysterious transaction, in which the distinct persons in the adorable Trinity are represented as sustaining different parts in the economy of man's redemption; the Father as choosing the objects of mercy, and appointing his well-beloved Son to be the Surety and Saviour of sinners—the Son as undertaking to accomplish the arduous work of man's redemption—the Holy Spirit as engaging to apply to the souls of men those gifts which the Father hath decreed, and the Son hath purchased. This noble, this glorious plan of salvation, where all the perfections of the divine nature are most illustriously displayed, and the rights of the di-

vine government completely vindicated, is the foundation of that covenant which God makes with his people.

He may be said to *make* this covenant with his people, when he brings them within the bond of *his* everlasting covenant—when he opens their eyes to perceive the sinfulness, misery, and danger of a natural state, and persuades and enables them to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the covenant, as all their salvation and all their desire. This is what is called, in the language of the Old Testament, *a laying hold of God's covenant*, which is the same thing in the new Testament with *believing the record of God*, and *receiving it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

When we are enabled thus to credit the testimony of God revealed in the covenant of grace; resting our hopes of eternal salvation on the sure foundation that is laid in Zion; then God becomes our God in cove-

nant, our Friend, our Father, our portion, and everlasting inheritance. What he is in himself he becomes to his people; his wisdom is theirs to guide them, his power to protect them, his faithfulness to support, and his goodness to bless them. His providence is engaged for their safety; his promises are all yea and amen to them in Christ Jesus; angels are their ministering spirits; the saints, the excellent ones of the earth, are their companions; and heaven at last will be their eternal home.

Nor is this all, when God says in his gracious covenant, *I will be your God*, he immediately subjoins, *and ye shall be my people*. He imparts the dispositions, as well as the privileges of children. He sends forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, enabling them to cry *Abba, Father*. He gives them a new heart and a right Spirit, causing them to walk in his statutes. He puts his laws into their inward parts, and his fear into their hearts, so that they shall not depart from him.

Thus are they formed for himself a peculiar people, to shew forth his praise. They are separated from the world in their spirit, aims, and conduct; and trained up under the discipline of the word, and providence, and Spirit of God for a nobler inheritance, that is incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading in the heavens.

Such, then, my Brethren, is the nature, such the foundation of the covenant which God makes with his people. But we shall have a fuller, and more distinct view of this subject, if we proceed as was proposed,

II. To consider the excellent properties of this covenant, mentioned in the text: It is *everlasting*,—*ordered in all things*—and *sure*.

1. It is *everlasting*. This covenant has its date in eternity, and the blessings it contains shall endure for ever. It sprung from the eternal purpose and counsel of Jehovah, and when millions of ages are past, it will still be unfolding its fulness and glory. As

the Author of this covenant is the everlasting unchangeable God, so the Mediator of it, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Every thing that pertains to the covenant, partakes of this invaluable property. Its righteousness is *an everlasting righteousness*. The forgiveness which it imparts is *everlasting forgiveness*. The kindness it unfolds to all who are within its sacred bond is *everlasting kindness*. And hence the consolation derived from it is *everlasting consolation*. Other things, in which men are apt to place their confidence are of short and uncertain duration, like the fashion of this world, which passeth away. But this covenant has a respect to eternity. Its blessings are as lasting as our immortal existence. It provides, not only for present peace and comfort, but likewise *for a great while*, even an eternity *to come*, carrying our thoughts beyond this poor transitory world, to that future boundless scene, when our state shall be unchangeably fixed.

2. It is *ordered in all things*.—It is aptly set, prepared, and disposed, as the word imports. It is so, both with regard to persons, and to things. With regard to persons, every one in this covenant occupies his proper place. God the Father appears as the great Author and gracious dispenser of its blessings; our adorable Redeemer acts as its Surety and Mediator, through whom alone all its blessings are communicated to the sons of men. And believers too, appear in their proper place in this covenant; while, as dependent, indebted creatures, they receive all from the hands of free grace, and bear for ever this humbling inscription, *Not for works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy hath he saved us.*

And as persons, so things are admirably ordered in this covenant, to promote the glory of God and the happiness of man. Here are blessings suited to all our wants—pardon for our guilt, wisdom for our ignorance, strength for our weakness, joy for our despondency, and stability to balance our

inconstancy. So wonderfully disposed is this covenant, that *all things work together for good to them that love God; to them that are the called according to his purpose.* In consequence of it, afflictions lose their nature, and are converted into blessings. Though *no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*

3. This covenant is *sure*—*Incline your ear, and come unto me,* says God, by the mouth of his prophet, *hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.* This covenant is built on a sure and immoveable foundation. It is not of works, but of grace, and *therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed.* Were its blessings suspended on certain conditions to be performed by the creature, (as some have supposed); were our own good works the condition, instead of being the

effect of an interest in it, then, so far from being sure, there would, in the present state of human nature, be the strongest probability that none of the guilty sons of Adam would ever partake of its blessings. But if it be founded (as it certainly is,) on the everlasting unchangeable purpose of God; if it is *not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy;* if the blessings of this covenant are safely lodged in the hands of a Mediator who has all power committed to him in heaven and on earth, and who is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, it necessarily follows, that the covenant is sure, and its blessings irrevocable. It is built upon a rock, against which the gates of hell can never prevail. *Neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The mountains shall depart, and the hills shall be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from*

thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.

Thus excellent are the properties of the covenant, which God has been pleased to make with his people. It is *everlasting—ordered in all things*—and *sure.* But it is now time to proceed,

III. To point out the comfort, which an interest in this covenant is suited to afford, under every kind and degree of trouble, particularly in the near and immediate prospect of death and eternity. *It is all my salvation,* says David, *and all my desire.*

Here, my Brethren, I wish to be as plain and practical as possible. The troubles to which the people of God are liable in the present state are various and complicated. I shall mention a few of the most common, and endeavour to point out the comfort which may be derived from an interest in God's covenant.

Are the children of God sometimes afflicted with a frail and sickly constitution? are they chastened with pain upon their beds, and the multitude of their bones with strong pain? And, by frequent returns of bodily distress, are they unfitted for such an active discharge of their duty as their hearts desire? In these circumstances, how cheering the comfort which an interest in God's covenant imparts to the soul! 'It is the hand 'of a Father that smites,' may the humble believer say, 'and it is in love, not in an-'ger that he is pleased to do so. *As many* '*as I love*, says he, *I rebuke and chasten*; 'and again, *Whom the Lord loveth he chas-'teneth, and scourgeth every son whom he* '*receiveth.* Why then should I complain, 'as if the Lord dealt unkindly with me, 'when he assures me, that this affliction is 'the fruit of his covenant love, and an evi-'dence of my adoption into his family. 'What though by this means I am laid a-'side from the active discharge of my du-'ty? I may glorify God as much by pa-'tient suffering as by active service. What 'though this mortal flesh decay? I have a

'*building of God, an house not made with*
'*hands, eternal in the heavens.* Yet a lit-
'tle while, and *this corruptible shall put on*
'*incorruption, and this mortal shall put on*
'*immortality.* This aching head shall then
'ache no more. These withered limbs shall
'be restored to immortal life and vigour.
'I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that
'he who believeth in him shall never die.
'Flesh and heart may fail, but God is the
'strength of my heart, and portion for e-
'ver.'

Again, Are the people of God often in poor and straitened circumstances in the world? An interest in the covenant is a blessed relief under all the care and anxiety that can spring from this source. It secures our best and most important interests. It points to a fair and rich inheritance beyond the skies. Nay, it gives a title to all that is truly valuable in this present life, in so far as the enjoyment of outward comfort is connected with the salvation of our souls. *All things are yours*, says the apostle, *whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the*

world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's. 'What 'though I cannot read my name and title to 'lands and houses, to fields and palaces, in 'large conveyances and writings under the 'seal of men, if I can read my name as a 'Christian in the covenant of grace, under 'the seal of God and the blood of his Son, 'since there I find all that heart can wish. 'Poor and mean I may be in my outward 'circumstances, but my portion, my trea-'sure, my happiness is secure; and having 'food and raiment, I bless God, I can there-'with be content. I have no estate, no 'plentiful inheritance to leave behind me, 'but I can commit my dearest earthly con-'cerns to the care of my unchangeable co-'venant God, who hath said, *Leave thy fa-'therless children, I will preserve them,* 'and *let thy widows trust in me.*'

But there are other trials still more severe than these, which the people of God must expect to endure, in their passage through this valley of tears. In the inter-

course of life, various circumstances will occur, to discompose and vex their minds. They may be disappointed in the object of their earthly pursuit; friends may prove faithless, or abandon them through mistake. Their character may be exposed to unjust and unmerited reproach, and the deepest wounds may come from a quarter whence they least expected it. Thus David bitterly complains, *It was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company.*

But even supposing that we should never experience the fickleness and inconstancy of friendship in such trying instances as these, there is another way in which all must expect to taste the bitterness of human woe. Death, that relentless enemy of man, whose empire is universal, is daily dis-

solving every tender connection. A few years at most will separate the dearest friends, and put an end to all those golden dreams of happiness, by which multitudes of unthinking creatures are fatally deluded. And ah! who can describe the bitter anguish that attends the parting stroke which divides souls that have been united in the closest and tenderest ties? who can tell the painful sensations of a feeling heart, on the loss of a friend, a brother, a child, a parent, a beloved husband or wife? These are among the heaviest afflictions of human life, to minds that are not altogether lost to every kind and generous affection. And no effectual remedy can be found against them, but in God's everlasting covenant. Here, indeed, sure and permanent comfort may be found, to relieve and support the mind. Do men deceive us, or *friends* forsake us? God never will. He is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother; a faithful, unchangeable, and everlasting *friend*, whose love is as great as his power, and knows neither measure nor end. He is not like man, fickle in his resolutions, and

changeable in his purposes, but *his counsel standeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart from generation to generation.* And having an interest in God's everlasting love, what is there, Christians, that need create you much uneasiness. *Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?* but *trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.*

You mourn the loss of dear departed friends; and some allowance is to be made for the feelings of nature. Jesus himself wept at the grave of Lazarus. But the covenant of grace forbids you to mourn as those that have no hope. If the friends whose loss you deplore were within the bond of that covenant, they are not lost; they are only gone a little before you to that blessed world, where all tears are for ever wiped away. They have left the sorrows and burdens of mortality behind them, and are now in the presence of God and of the Lamb, crowned with unfading glory, and never-ending bliss. Nor shall the time

be long that separates you from their beloved society. A little while, and you shall follow them to the same happy country, to be for ever with the Lord: for *if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.*

But supposing you are doubtful respecting their eternal state, and even have reason to entertain gloomy fears concerning it, still your own interest in the covenant forbids immoderate grief. Your situation cannot be worse than that of David, who mourned the loss of two profligate children, cut off in the midst of their days and wickedness. Yet he could say, *Although my house be not so with God, he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.*

In this trying case, it becomes you to bow to the sovereign will of God, and to bless his name that he hath given you your

own souls for a prey. Wise and good reasons there are for every part of the divine administration, though we cannot always perceive them. Our Lord's words to Peter are peculiarly applicable in this case, and ought to quiet the mind of a believer under the smart of this most painful stroke, *What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.* Wait, ye mourning saints, that all-decisive day, which will explain every dark providence, and unravel every perplexing mystery. And, in the meanwhile, take comfort from the covenant that God hath made with you, which effectually secures all that is necessary to your happiness, both here and hereafter.

In all these cases, then, (and many more that might be mentioned) an interest in God's covenant is a source of unspeakable and never-failing comfort. But the comfort of an interest in the covenant appears to the highest advantage at the close of life, when all other comfort fails, and the trembling soul just ready to enter into the eternal world, stands in need of the strong-

est support. "As the sun paints the fairest colours on the blackest clouds, and while the thick dark shower is descending, entertains the eye with all the variegated beauties of the rainbow; so the covenant of grace, of which this is both the emblem and the seal, can give a bright aspect even to death itself, and spread light and pleasure over the dark and gloomy grave *."

If we are within the bond of this covenant, death is ours, as well as life. It is numbered among the *all things* that belong to the Christian's treasure. And a noble privilege, an invaluable blessing it is to the saints, since it finishes their state of labour and suffering, and puts them in complete possession of their glorious inheritance, of light, and joy, and life eternal. Death to the happy believer is disarmed of his sting, and stripped of all his terrors. The death of Christ has completely vanquished this formidable foe, and secured the victory to all his called, and chosen, and faithful.

* Watts.

Come, my Friends, enter into the chamber of a dying saint, in the lively exercise of divine faith, and with the bright prospects of immortality full in his view; observe the smile that sits upon his countenance; view his patience, his resignation, his peaceful serenity; hear the holy and heavenly language that drops from his lips;—'I go the 'way of all the earth, and I long to be gone, 'to be where my Saviour is. I have trust-'ed in him for salvation; I have committed 'my everlasting all into his faithful hands; 'and I know whom I have believed. O the 'heavenly peace and joy that I now find in 'God's everlasting, sure, and well-ordered co-'venant. It has been my support through life, 'under many painful trials and overwhelming 'sorrows. And now, when drawing near to 'the eternal world, and about to bid adieu 'to all things here below, it is the spring of 'joy unspeakable and full of glory. With 'my Shepherd's rod and staff to support me, 'I can walk fearless and undismayed, 'through the valley of the shadow of death. 'For *this God is my God for ever and ever; 'he will be my guide even unto death:* yea,

'*he is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.* I have no righteousness of my own to plead at God's tribunal; no covering at all to screen my naked guilty soul from the stroke of divine justice. But I bless God who hath given me faith to rely on the all-atoning efficacy of my Redeemer's blood, and the infinite merit of his perfect righteousness; so that now, through faith in his name, I can triumph with the apostle, and say, *O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law: But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Welcome, then, the peaceful messenger that conveys my willing spirit into the arms of my Saviour and my God. I resign this frail corruptible body to the grave with the utmost pleasure, knowing that in due season, even my sleeping dust shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and awake in triumph to a blissful and glorious immortality.'

Thus, my Brethren, have I endeavoured to point out the comfort which an interest in God's covenant is suited to afford under every kind and degree of trouble; particularly at the close of life, in the near and immediate prospect of death and eternity. And surely this fully justifies the high and honourable appellation which the pious king of Israel here bestows upon it, when he calls it *all his salvation and all his desire.*

And now, my Brethren, upon a review of all that has been said, must we not acknowledge, that they are blessed indeed who are within the bond of God's everlasting covenant. Let us bring the matter home to ourselves and ask, Are *we* partakers of this blessedness? Have we been convinced of the misery, guilt, and danger of a natural state; and, under this conviction, have we fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us in the gospel? Do our tempers and lives bear witness to the sincerity of our profession? Has the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, taught us effectually to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to

live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world? Alas! my Brethren, the lives of multitudes declare too plainly their ignorance of the gospel, and their total estrangement from the covenant of promise. If the wilful indulgence of pride, of resentment, of sensuality, of earthly mindedness, could consist with the hope of the gospel, and an interest in the covenant, then many might lay claim to it. But if the love of sin and the hope of eternal life be totally incompatible; if the pleasures of sin, and the pleasures of true godliness cannot exist together; if none can enjoy the comforts of the Holy Ghost, but such as walk in the fear of the Lord, and have a respect unto all his commandments; alas! how few are giving evidence of their interest in God's covenant! how few have any title to make the comfortable words of the text their own.

Yet, without this, my Friends, be assured you cannot be happy. The world can never bestow on its deluded votaries true, solid, and lasting comfort. You may compass yourselves about for a little, with sparks

of your own kindling; you may amuse yourselves for a season with the cares, the business, or the gaieties of life; but *this shall you have at the hand of God, you shall lie down in sorrow* at last. Awake, deluded men, from this fatal dream! Why any longer will you expect happiness from the world? Why seek the living among the dead? *Why spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me*, says the merciful Redeemer, *hear, and your souls shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*

Believe it, my friends, nothing can prevent your happiness, but your own impenitence and unbelief, your wilful and obstinate rejection of Christ and his blessed covenant. The blessings of salvation are as free as they are complete. The gospel proclaims pardon and peace to them that are afar off, as well as to them that are nigh. Therein is the righteousness of God brought nigh to every guilty despairing sinner, who

feels his need of mercy, and is willing to be saved in God's appointed way, to the praise of his glorious grace. Listen therefore to the voice of sovereign mercy. Believe on the name of the Son of God. Forsake every false and wicked way. Turn to the Lord with all your hearts, and join yourselves to him in a perpetual covenant, never to be forgotten. Then shall you enjoy the comfort of which you have been hearing. This covenant will prove to you a perennial spring of joy, amidst all the changing circumstances of your lot. It will be your staff through life, your support at death, and the source of unutterable bliss through eternity. *Amen and Amen.*

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